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# ST. COLETTE AND HER REFORM

A PAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

*Translated from the French of Madame Ste Marie  
Perrin by*

MRS. CONOR MAGUIRE.

*Edited, with preface, by the  
REV. GEORGE O'NEILL, S. J., M.A.*

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## PREFACE

'Twas the hour of the flaming out of the sun from the fogs  
of the North

When Colette, as a grain full-ripe, sees the shell burst forth  
Of the narrow cell she had built twelve feet from the altar  
of God,

Its sill no more to be trod.

But now the voice of heaven has sounded : " Forth, and  
abroad ! "

No need of enclosure now in the shell of stone ;  
She is free in the salt of heaven, she is walled in light  
alone.

God, knowing good before ill, to this girl has given  
No brief temporal task, but to heal  
The hurts of a land, of a Church, that are rent and riven.  
Hell and its works she shall know in the course of a week  
—and feel.

She takes and bends in her hand like a waxen taper the  
bar of steel ;

But she is not sent to challenge the devil to duels of steel.  
The tender harvest of good, the flower of innocent peace  
She must woo from their root in the earth, so bring sur-  
cease

Of the choking weeds of sin that blossom in blood.

So does Nature herself on the slope of a quiet hill

Copy a glorious lily's exuberant bud,

While men beneath are destroying and slaying and plotting  
ill.



So then, like a diligent needle, in and out of the torn  
and ravelled realm of France  
Glides she, and mends from beneath ; and whatever the  
lance  
Has left agape, with charity sweet she bindeth in one,  
Innocent, guided by God, she knows not what she has  
done :  
She sees but Him and His ways : she hears but Him and  
obeys,  
Mother of hungry little ones, her nestlings that cry from  
the chinks of the wall—  
He provideth their food, who marketh the sparrow's fall.  
Meantime Satan toils with glee, and knows not the ruin  
to come.—  
Yet what is there new to be seen on those roads 'twixt  
Paris and Rome ?  
Behold that woman, frowsily gowned, upheld by Sister  
Perrine  
On a lumbering cart, in her looks the light of things un-  
seen !  
No doubt the wise political eye to the council at Constance  
will fly,  
Or study that " man of the moon "—the singular Shepherd  
from Spain ;  
But we—we will turn from these to a rough Burgundian  
lane  
And four or five peasants and women that plod  
By the oats in the fields, the windmill, the willow-tree,  
And one among them, dusty and poor—Colette. 'Tis she,  
Calmly breasting the hill on her ass, riding direct to God.

*(Translated by G. O'N. from the original of Paul Claudel.)*

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## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

FOR the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the historical frame-work of the life of St. Colette, the following sketch has been written.

### I.—FRANCE FROM 1380 TO 1450.

In 1380 France, already since 1337 involved in the "Hundred Years War" with England, entered upon a period of calamities. These began with the deaths of Bertrand de Guesclin and Charles the Fifth. Bertrand was an almost ideal medieval warrior, brave and generous, who desired his comrades "never to forget that in whatsoever country they might be making war churchmen, women, children and the poor people were not their enemies." During the half-century which followed France had only too good reason to deplore the neglect of so good a rule. As for Charles V., he was a wise king who for twenty-four years had maintained order and prosperity in his realm in spite of turbulent personages both without and within. Under his successor, Charles VI., who at his accession was but twelve years old, a civil war of the worst kind broke out and for forty years—with a lull between 1392 and 1402—devastated and dishonoured France. The king's four uncles—one of them Duke of Burgundy—were fierce rivals for power. A few

years later he married Isabel of Bavaria, whose misconduct rendered her during a generation a chief plague of the kingdom. Soon after his marriage Charles, owing to two successive tragic accidents became mentally deranged and, except for occasional lucid intervals, was never again able to take an effective part in public affairs. His brother Louis, Duke of Orleans, was the favourite and intimate of the queen, and under her influence the king in 1402 placed in his hands a virtual regency. Other counsellors, however, prevailed upon Charles to transfer back this concession to the Duke of Burgundy. Thus the two princes were involved in rivalry which assumed a still more bitter form when in 1404 the Duke of Burgundy died, leaving his great possessions and claims to his still more formidable son—John the Fearless. In 1407 John's partisans—always numerous in Paris—murdered the Duke of Orleans. In 1410 the latter's heir, also named Charles, married the daughter of the Count d'Armagnac, —the most powerful, able and ambitious man in Southern France; he became the leader of the Orleanist party, henceforth styled "the Armagnacs." "Armagnacs" and "Burgundians" filled France with scenes of cruelty and devastation. In 1415 supervened an invasion by the warlike Henry V. of England and the sanguinary defeat at Agincourt. In 1417 the newly-elected pope, Martin V., made earnest endeavours to bring about peace between Burgundians and Armagnacs and also between France and England; but with little success. Meantime the Dauphin—eldest son of Charles VI. and Isabel—was growing up and his claims complicated the situation. In 1418 the Burgundians seized Paris and perpetrated a frightful massacre of their opponents. In 1419 the Duke

of Burgundy was induced to meet the Dauphin at a conference and was there assassinated. Henry V. proceeded to draw from this event all possible advantage to himself. He succeeded in negotiating in 1420 a treaty (that of Troyes) favoured chiefly by the new Duke of Burgundy, deeply humiliating to France and ruinous to the Dauphin. Though the treaty did much to re-unite patriotic Frenchmen against England, and the deaths in rapid succession of Henry V. and of Charles VI. in 1422 gave a happier turn to the young Charles's fortunes, still his lack of energy and ability left him far inferior to the capable Duke of Bedford, now regent of France for the new king of England. In 1428 appeared at last the heaven-sent champion predestined to end both the Hundred Years War with England and the miserable half-century of civil strife. Joan of Arc, the shepherd maid of Domrémy, by her rapid victories made Charles VII truly king of France. Her spirit and inspiration were akin to those of Colette Boillet, different as were their careers : both, in sheer docility to divine guidance, delivered vast populations from spiritual and temporal calamities. Joan yielded up her life a sacrifice at the hands of her enemies in 1431 : but her memory was juridically re-habilitated in 1455, and she was canonized in 1921.



## II.—THE PAPACY FROM 1378 TO 1447.

During a great part of the fourteenth century the Popes had been absent from Rome, resident at Avignon and unduly subject to the influence of France. The evils resulting from this state of things were deplored not only

at Rome but throughout the Catholic world generally. Under the influence of good advisers, such as St. Catherine of Sienna, Pope Gregory XI., a Frenchman, migrated to Rome in 1378, but found there a prevalence of disorder and ruin which tempted him( it is said) to return forthwith to Avignon. He presently, however, fell sick and died. The conclave which met to elect his successor was an agitated one. The question which dominated all others was the choice between Rome and Avignon : outside, the Roman populace were clamouring for a Roman or (at the very least) an Italian pope : there were only sixteen cardinals assembled and the Italians found no suitable candidate in their number. However, after a conclave of only two days duration the choice of the electors fell upon Bartolommeo Prignani, archbishop of Bari, who was not a cardinal, but had once been secretary to Gregory XI. All would now have been well had the new pope—Urban VI.—shown himself as distinguished by tact and moderations as he had hitherto been for an austere and blameless life, but unhappily it was far otherwise. In taking up the cause of reform in the Church, especially as regarded the manner of life of the cardinals, Urban entered upon a course of rigorous and violent action, which presently rendered him widely feared and hated. Consequently the French party and the cardinals began to cast about for excuses to declare Urban's election invalid, and in the intimidating behaviour of the Roman mob on the occasion they thought they found the pretext needed. They therefore seceded in a body, and proclaiming the former election invalid elected as pope, under the title of Clement VII, the Cardinal Count Robert of Geneva, a man of royal and powerful connections but chiefly known as



the military leader of ruthless and rapacious mercenaries. Thus began the great schism of the West, which for some forty years divided and perplexed the allegiance of the Catholic nations. Of the state of things which ensued a good picture is given in the following pages (especially in Chapter I). Urban's harshness and violence continued to alienate his supporters till his death in 1389. He was then succeeded by Pietro Tomacelli—Boniface IX.—who neither by learning nor otherwise was highly qualified for his supreme office. In 1394 Clement VII. passed away at Avignon. His adherents elected in his place the Catalonian cardinal Pedro de Luna—a remarkable man, hitherto distinguished for learning and an austere virtuous life, also for efforts to extinguish the papal schism, but who henceforward became notable for the unyielding obstinacy with which he maintained his own claims to the tiara.

Meantime important public bodies, such as the University of Paris, were exerting themselves to bring about a settlement. The eagerness of all good men for such a consummation was whetted by the disastrous inroads of the Saracens, who, led on by their caliph Bajazet, were threatening Europe and Christianity. In fact Bajazet routed a large Christian army on the plains of Nicopolis in Hungary, and unspeakable calamities might have followed had not Providence raised up from the far East an opponent to Bajazet; this was the Tartar chief, Tamerlane, by whom Bajazet was in his turn defeated and carried off to captivity.

In 1404 died Boniface IX. and was succeeded by Innocent VII., whose short and perturbed pontificate of two years did not allow him to carry out his good intentions

as to terminating the schism. In 1406, the cardinals of his obedience, having bound themselves by a compact that whichever of their number should be elected pope should do all in his power to end the schism and should even resign in case Benedict XIII. should be willing to do so likewise, elected in place of Innocent Aingelo Corario, thenceforth called Gregory XII, who was esteemed for prudence, piety and learning, but who played, nevertheless, a disappointing part in the years which followed. In 1407 a general feeling showed itself that the cause of unity should not be left to negotiations between the two rival pontiffs, especially as their proceedings afforded little proof of sincerity. In 1408 a large number of cardinals of both obediences met at Leghorn and agreed to convoke a general council to be held at Pisa in March, 1409. Letters of invitation were sent out to Gregory and Benedict, who, however, replied by excommunicating the Cardinals, and declaring their intentions of convoking each a council under his own authority. Under these omens of ill the Council of Pisa met, and, although both large and representative, it succeeded only in aggravating the evils it was meant to heal. For in the first place many of its members endeavoured to base their doubtful juridical position on principles dangerous to lawful pontifical authority—principles which lived on to be misapplied with serious practical consequences. In the next place, they took on themselves to elect a new pope, without having secured the abdication of either of the existing claimants. Their choice fell upon the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, of obscure origin but high personal merit, who took the name of Alexander V. From this time Christendom was divided and distracted no longer

into two but into three warring jurisdictions and obediences.

Alexander V. tried to strengthen his weak position by leaning on Balthazar Cossa, Cardinal Legate of Bologna, a man of no good repute.\* When Alexander died in 1410, Cossa was elected to succeed him, under the name of John XXIII.; and for the next four years things seemed at their worst. It was the good fortune of Sigismund king of Hungary, elected in 1410 emperor, to be the instrument of Providence in bringing about a decisive turn for the better. He prevailed on John XXIII. to convene a General Council, the protection of which he himself undertook. It met at Constance in 1414—a huge and miscellaneous assembly, including at one time eighteen thousand ecclesiastics, while some fifty thousand strangers swarmed in the town; but, whatever its imperfections, it set to work with vigour and thoroughness and finally brought to an end the great schism. In November 1417 it was possible to elect a new pope, who rallied to himself the practically universal suffrages of Christendom. Cardinal Colonna, now called Martin V., Gregory XII. and John XXIII. were both induced to resign: Benedict XIII. remained obdurate till his death in 1424, but his following was reduced to three or four individuals.

During the forty years of the schism heresy and other disorders naturally showed themselves with greater freedom than in more settled times. At this period Wiclef (or Wycliffe), whose followers were called Lollards, taught various errors impugning the authority of the Church and the Papacy, the Sacrament of Penance and

\* The story, however, of Cossa's having once been a pirate is now discredited.

the Eucharist and other Catholic beliefs. Similar views, in fact derived from Wiclef's, were propagated by John Huss and Jerome of Prague—two Bohemian leaders, whose influence for evil lasts up to the present day. In 1410 Huss appealed from the Archbishop of Prague to the Pope and later on from both to a general Council. In 1414 he presented himself at Constance, having obtained a safe-conduct from the Emperor. This did not, nor was intended to prevent his being put on trial for heresy. The pleadings occupied three days, after which he was required to abjure thirty errors contained in his writings; on his refusal he was condemned, degraded from the clerical dignity and handed over to the civil authorities, by whom death—the recognized punishment of obstinate heresy—was inflicted in July 1415. The same fate befell in the following year his associate, Jerome of Prague.

Martin V. pursued courageously his difficult work of rebuilding materially and spiritually the ruins which confronted him at Rome and throughout the universal Church. In accordance with pledges given at his election he summoned a General Council: after some delays and false starts it got to work in 1431, when Martin himself had already died. Its history was an unhappy one. Its sessions were usually very sparsely attended; it got into conflict from the outset with the Pope—Eugene IV.—an excellent pontiff but somewhat lacking in tact and diplomacy. Its schismatical spirit culminated in 1439 in the election of an anti-pope—Amadeus Duke of Savoy, who took the title of Felix V. Such proceedings neutralised the more commendable efforts of the Fathers of Basle—their proceedings against the Hussites, in favour of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and towards

reconciliation of the Eastern with the Western Church. The ever-open sore of the Greek schism was a primary concern of this pontificate. In 1438 Eugene IV, repudiating the assembly at Basle, summoned a Council of East and West, called "of Florence," which was largely attended and sat till 1445. After discussion of many important theological matters it succeeded in fixing a basis of agreement whereon Constantinople could enter into communion with Rome. This good work was largely frustrated by the jealous recalcitrance of certain Greek ecclesiastics, by popular prejudices in the East and also by the capture and sack of Constantinople, followed by the fall of the Greek Empire,\* at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Nevertheless the efforts of the Council of Florence bore good fruit during succeeding years in bringing back many thousands of Asiatic and African Christians from schism and heresy to union with the Holy See.

In 1447, (the year of St. Colette's death) Nicholas V, came to the papal throne. He governed the Church with ability and earned fame as a patron of learning and art.

*The Editor.*

\* The long-surviving Eastern half of the ancient Roman Empire.



# ST. COLETTE & HER REFORMS

## I.

### THE STORMY DAWN OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF COLETTE'S MISSION

WITH the exception of Joan of Arc, radiant as the lightning and as swiftly eclipsed, the woman best known and most revered in all France, during the first half of the fifteenth century, was Colette of Corbie. When Joan began her mission—little more than a child, but a child inspired with sublimest courage—Colette was forty years old, and had already accomplished much of her life's work. Although a nun, she was neither cloistered nor hidden; on the contrary, her life was mainly spent in journeying from place to place, seated on the back of a mule or in a rude cart, over the roads of Flanders, Burgundy, Auxois, and Picardy. Her woollen cloak and veil were dark grey; her feet unshod. She was a disciple of St. Francis of Assisi, a "Clarisse," or Poor Clare, engaged on the work of founding monasteries of strict observance and restoring to their former discipline those in which lax practices had been tolerated. Coveting no honours, she was nevertheless received with reverence throughout her journeys, the people flocking round her as the news of her coming



spread from village to village. Welcomed by all classes alike, she utilised the charity of the poor and the help of the rich and powerful in furtherance of the great designs which she had at heart. For the Church she worked incessantly : for France she offered up her penances. The evils of the time were so great and widespread that it need not surprise us to find even women leaving their seclusion to try and remedy them. For when a country is suffering, it is the women who suffer most. The deepest sense of a nation's misery is to be found in the hearts of its women ; and once this feeling has penetrated there, it takes complete possession and transforms them. The men, combatants from the start, may show signs of exhaustion ; then the anguish of the mothers produces so grievous a sense of injustice that they themselves endeavour to find some way of setting things right. The vital spark of hope is often kindled by the unbearable desperation of a woman.

Colette of Corbie was the precursor of Joan of Arc. She desired that her life should be devoted solely to apostolic work among the monasteries. But, side by side with this apostolate, or perhaps on account of it and of the dignity with which it invested her, she was able to exercise a considerable influence on the public affairs of the time, and on those who were at their head. She was on terms of friendship with the rulers of Burgundy, while the royal house of France accorded to her protection ; her advice was sought by the Armagnacs and the Bourbons ; the rulers of Geneva and Savoy co-operated in her good works. Thus she held in her hands connecting links between all the powerful factions of that France which was warring around her—links which were often broken, and which she did her best to re-unite. More

than once, appalled by the devastation caused by the war, she implored the combatants to suspend their fighting, to at least postpone these sanguinary conflicts, so that, in a more pacific atmosphere, some settlement might be arrived at. She belonged to France, not to any section of it. Among her friends, her helpers, her protectors, she numbered Charles VII., Jacques de Bourbon, Marguerite Duchess of Burgundy, John the Fearless, Mary, Duchess of Bourbon—the friend of Joan of Arc, and Bernard, son of the Constable of Armagnac. The only contemporary sovereign with which she was not acquainted was the King of England, who at that time was trying to conquer France. She was also devoted to the cause of the Church, which, alas, like France, was rent asunder by internal discords. Having all her life deplored the division of papal authority, Colette—like St. Catherine of Sienna in former years—exerted herself to aid the Council (“Council of Wisdom”) which finally brought about the end of the schism. In conjunction with St. Vincent Ferrer, she wrote a letter to the Council of Constance. And when the confusion caused by the devastating schism was at its height, not long before her death, she implored the old Duke Amadeus of Savoy—known afterwards as Felix V.—not to accept the tiara offered him by the schismatics of Basle.

These all-important matters were the dominating interests of her life; meanwhile her days were spent in unobtrusive, constant work. Taking as her special charge a large tract of country extending from Nivernais to Flanders, and from Ile de France to Savoy, Colette continued her work for forty years, founding new convents, reforming others, rousing up the apathetic, and

instructing the ignorant. She wins from the charity of the faithful the support of an immense number of nuns. The Franciscans, her brothers in religion, were quite conquered by her zeal; seventeen convents of women were actually founded by her, the best known being those of Besançon, Auxonne, Decize, Poligny, Hesdin-en-Artois, and Ghent, where she died; and shortly after her death a census of the monasteries, both of men and women, which had adopted her reforms, reveals the remarkable figure of three hundred and eighty-five.\*

How came it that so important a mission devolved on this young girl, obscure and unknown, the daughter of a humble artisan of Corbie? The complexities of a Church schism, the decadence of the orders founded two centuries previously by St. Francis of Assisi, might well seem subjects above the competence of a young girl's mind. The most resolute will might well be daunted at the thought of attempting, single-handed, the reform of those great and widespread mendicant orders, in the hope that they in their turn might revive the spirit of penance throughout France.

In the face of such problems, we shall at least attempt to describe how a hidden and humble life was brought into touch with great public happenings; how, through widely-sundered helpers and a strange chain of events, a personality, obscure in itself, but full of forceful vitality was all at once thrust prominently into a wide sphere of action, where under ordinary circumstances it would have lurked unnoticed and unknown. So closely and inextricably are individual destinies sometimes interwoven with the great events of the world, that it is only on looking

\* Fodéré, *Eglises et monastères de l'ordre de Saint François*.

back over the past we can perceive the threads that held the varied web together. We ourselves, who have lived through a time of danger and difficulties, are not unfamiliar with the striking changes often wrought in those who are called on to face grave emergencies. And even at this distance of time we can trace in the history of the fifteenth century the same urgent appeals being made to souls and meeting the same generous response.

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\* \*

In 1405 the dual papacy, known as the Great Schism of the West, had existed in the Church for twenty-five years, all Christendom being thereby disorganised. It is not easy to apportion the blame for this division of the supreme religious authority, which began in a very simple way, in the year 1378. When, on the death of Pope Gregory XI., the cardinals assembled in conclave to choose his successor, the Roman populace became alarmed lest a foreign pope should be elected—a Frenchman or a Spaniard, who might bring back to Avignon the papal see, lately re-established in Rome with great difficulty, after a “Babylonian captivity” of fifty years. Clamouring loudly for an Italian pope, a crowd assembled outside the Vatican, besieged the great gates of bronze, and threatened the cardinals with death. Eventually an Italian pope was elected, the Archbishop of Bari, Bartholomew Prignano. Now, there is nothing to show that the cardinals who voted had at the time any doubts as to the validity of their choice. But the new pope, Urban VI., although a priest of irreproachable and even austere character, did not appreciate the need for tact in the exercise of his authority; and before long he annoyed in various ways the cardinals, who were also, mostly,

haughty noblemen. And it came to pass that some months after the election, when the summer heat made Rome unbearable, the cardinals left the city one by one, and made their way to Anagni. There, among the fresh breezes of the Sabine country, they began to discuss various tardy doubts. Could an election, they queried, be considered valid, which was held under threats of violence, during the open revolt of an excited populace? Might not the votes of a certain number of the cardinals have been influenced by fear? Would it not really be desirable to revise the conclave's decision, especially as its result was by no means entirely successful? How far this decision was made in good faith, and due to scruples of conscience; how far influenced by personal rancour or hidden dislike, who shall say? They took immediate action. A new conclave was summoned, as a result of which a new pope, Robert of Geneva, was elected and assumed the name of Clement VII. The sacred College was thenceforth split asunder. According to their nationality, their sympathies, their consciences, some followed the new pope and some adhered to the old one. Several had all along publicly declared that they had declared for Urban VI. with free will and unfettered judgment, and consequently they could not and would not retract their votes. Urban VI. remained in Rome. Clement VII. left Italy and took up his residence in the palace at Avignon. Each stoutly asserted his rights; each relied on innumerable canonical dissertations; they nominated new cardinals and organised their separate courts. The Church could only be compared to a ship on whose deck two rival captains have taken their stand.

The inevitable results followed—profound and wide-

spread disorder, both as to the Church's religious life and her external government ; with many other grave and far-reaching consequences. May we not even say that this split paved the way for the Reformation, through the lack of discipline and other abuses which were its direct and indirect results ? Even the balance of power in Europe was disturbed. The faithful beheld the "Seamless Robe" rent asunder : the politicians, in whose various interests the Church was concerned, were all up in arms. Through the religious faith of peoples and of princes, through the moral and material powers of the Holy See, Rome was in touch with every country, every institution, every individual. The confusion, therefore was universal and terrific. Everyone looked on the pope of his choice as the true and only sovereign ; and so indeed he was. For the only possible rule to follow until the difficulty should be solved by a General Council, was that of good faith. And the powers of the papacy, even when contested and divided, were nevertheless absolute and complete in each of the popes, so far as those who recognised their authority and jurisdiction were concerned. Now the popes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries entered into all the European complications, both spiritual and temporal ; they controlled the wealth and power represented by benefices and dispensations. Each pontiff could interdict and excommunicate those who recognised any hostile power, and in this case both the rivals did so. The various states, large and small, of which Europe was then composed, fell into groups around each chief, influenced by a hundred different reasons, and with the most erratic results. A map representing in two colours the distribution of the two camps, or "obediences," as



they were called, would show a much more complicated figure than a political map of the same time ; there were, in fact, more religious sections than there were states. And these sections were not even stable in their choice ; many of them changed sides several times. The great Powers of Europe proclaimed their allegiance, so to speak, at the top of their voices ; England and the German Empire upheld the Roman Pontiff, while France, headed by Charles V., was the chief and, for a time, the sole supporter of the pope at Avignon. By the interplay of alliances and enmities, the smaller states were drawn into the wake of the bigger ones ; and various political disturbances, like the ebb and flow of a tide, were constantly sweeping in adherents or leaving their vacant places, at the feet of the rival pontiff, alienating them.\*

\* Arragon was at first faithful to Urban VI., but in 1387, at the instigation of France, it took Pope Clement's side. A part of Spain then followed Arragon, as did also its ally Sicily. Portugal, on the other hand, had two years previously joined the opposite party. Flanders came over to Clement in 1392, but the towns of Flanders were free, and Ghent and Mechlin preferred to remain under the Roman pontiff. Side by side with Urbanist England, Scotland professed obedience to Clement VII., as did also a portion of Ireland. Germany, Bohemia, the Scandinavian States, Austria, the Tyrol, Alsace, all adhered to the Pope of Rome, while Lorraine is doubtful and divided. The East is, for the most part, on Clement's side. Italy, while mainly "Roman," has as many varieties of opinion as she has republics, and changes them to suit her convenience. There is no fixed rule ; confusion is everywhere. Men's minds are profoundly troubled. Those who are thoughtful and enlightened do not always share the official opinion of the country where they live. At the University of Paris, for instance, we find two distinguished strangers, Marsile d'Inghem and Henry of Hesse, leaving France because they are not in accord with the government of Charles V. and the opinions which it enforces.



The year 1405, in which our narrative begins, was a time of depression and discouragement among those engaged in this long struggle. The Christian world, having attempted to decide the conflict by force, having for twenty years rent itself asunder in various wars without achieving any decisive result, had decided to give up fighting and try negotiation. Battles and intrigues having failed, it was time to begin discussions. The end to be attained was patent to all :—that the Church should be ruled by one pope and one only. With this object in view, one of the reigning popes was to be induced, either by force or by argument, to give way to the other ; or, better still, both might be persuaded to consent to deposition, thus clearing the way for a Council and a happy final settlement.

On two occasions previously, hopes of such a result had run high. In 1389 Urban VI. had died, and the whole Church might then have given allegiance to the one pope who remained. But those who hoped for this were disappointed. In the eyes of the Roman cardinals, Clement VII. simply did not exist. They elected a new pope, Boniface IX. Five years later, Clement VII. passed away. This time the King of France, on hearing the news, despatched an urgent message to the cardinals at Avignon, begging of them to defer the election, in the hope of finding some basis of understanding and peace. But the cardinals, already assembled in the Palace, acted as if the courier had arrived too late ; they ignored the king's injunction ; and, under the worthless guarantee of a preliminary oath which pledged the future pope to do "everything in his power to restore unity in the Church," they elected Pedro de

Luna, of Arragon, who assumed the name of Benedict XIII.

A double line of popes had therefore been founded. No longer a passing incident, the schism was now a tradition which became more and more firmly established each time a pope died. As the origin of the cleavage receded into the remote and obscure past, the irreconcilable claims of the two rivals were being still further strengthened and affirmed. Instead of the undivided Apostolic Succession, there appeared two lines running a parallel course, with no possibility of meeting; and Christians everywhere, in distress of spirit, asked what barrier could be raised which would put a stop to both one and the other. Weary of an intolerable situation, the people themselves eventually formed the needful barrier. The time was coming when a handful of stubborn men would no longer find support from either princes or states: when a universal desire for unity and settled government would refuse to tolerate the obstinacy of both parties, with their bargainings, pretences and delays. When the fifteenth century opened, the time for regarding the papal schism as an opportunity for profitable conflicts had gone by: it was recognised as a hindrance and an embarrassment. The learned Gerson had discussed the different aspects of this duel between the general body of the faithful and their chiefs. The whole University, which at the time boasted of so many subtle theologians, argued hotly as to the different ways of arriving at this desirable concord; and if for a moment the much-talked-of "*voie de cession*" appeared to have been found, there was joy and thanksgiving on all sides. "Truly God has given us victory," cries Gerson on

one of these occasions, "when He inclines the hearts of the two disputants to the path of peace, so often sought for and asked for, the 'path of mutual yielding.' Let us raise our hearts, let us drive away all other cares, let us spend this hour in contemplating this admirable gift, this peace which is coming to us. How many times, during the past thirty years and more, have we not urgently asked for peace, clamoured for peace, sighed for peace!"

It was this universal sigh for peace which was at last to bring it about. But not without many checks and setbacks; for ultimate success was only attained through numberless discussions, agreements, prolonged councils, and the intervention of many saints. Little by little the spirit of Christendom, so long divided against itself, became again united; the will of the people, backed up by their rulers, soon rectified the evils brought about by disunion; and after forty years, the Church stood forth again, with its hierarchy re-established in order and seemliness.

But in the year 1405 the confusion was still at its height; and the short account we have given of a stormy epoch gives only a faint idea of the enormous importance of this weighty problem, alike to the world at large and to each individual. It was of personal interest even to the humblest; while for the learned and for those who were deeply concerned with religious matters it involved a perpetual anxious quest for light. To take one example: During the twelve years that elapsed between the election of Benedict XIII. (the second anti-pope of Avignon) and the year of which we write, the French clergy had been summoned to discuss this question no less than

four times—sufficient reason, all will agree, to disturb the most placid consciences. Again, for the space of four years, France had not officially recognised any pope at all, having withdrawn her “obedience” to Benedict XIII. ; while in 1405 she had renewed her allegiance to him. And four years later, the assembly at Pisa, having constituted itself a Council, elected a third pope, to be succeeded in due course by the perfidious John XXIII., who, a chronicler tells us, had been at one time a pirate off the coast of Sicily !



It was in 1406 that a Franciscan monk of Chambéry, Henri de la Roche et de la Baume, wishing to escape from these difficulties, to get away from this dusty conflict, decided to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. A man of great intelligence and piety, belonging to an aristocratic family of Savoy, he was then forty years old. His advantages of birth and intellect, and his religious zeal, joined to a very special charm of manner, had attracted many who were seeking for light amid the religious perplexities of the day, and in Savoy he was constantly being called on to act as arbitrator in such matters—a heavy responsibility indeed. Uncertain himself, how was he to advise others ? With France on one side, and Italy on the other, each loyal to a different pope, Savoy was permeated by both influences, and completely upset by their contradictions. So Henri de la Baume, afraid of deceiving himself in so difficult a choice, afraid of leading others into paths of error, decided on this pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In those days this journey might easily mean an absence of two or three years, and during that time the religious horizon might become less obscure.

In any case, the pilgrim would escape from dissension and turmoil while drawing close to the very source of Christianity, would possess his soul in solitude and peace, and would renew his faith within that holy city whose very name was an inspiration to the Christian Middle Ages. . . . In this spirit Henri de la Baume set forth.

Neither his name nor that of his brother Alard is to be found in the annals of the renowned and powerful house of de la Baume, a junior branch of the Dukes of Savoy, to whom it gave service ; famous for its men of arms, rich in titles and property ; one of whose most notable representatives, William de la Baume, was Governor of the heir of Savoy, the Count Verd, Amadeus VIII., and envoy for the ducal house with France and Dauphiny. Possibly Henri and Alard belonged to a junior branch of the family ; perhaps they were merely of the same name. We know, at all events, that the family to which the friar belonged was " one of the foremost in the country," that it was very rich, and belonged to Savoy.

Of the monastery of Chambéry as it was in 1405, nothing now remains ; but some fragments of its chapel are to be found in the great church of St. Francis, which was rebuilt in the sixteenth century, and is now the Cathedral of Chambéry. The monastery, rich in gifts and endowments, was of considerable size ; in the town itself, on the bank of the river Albane, a great archway gave access to its grounds. The whole place has been rebuilt, but on the same site, and one can still get a good idea of its situation and of its importance.

Along the banks of the Rhone Père de la Baume took his way, until he came to Provence. He was handsome, we are told, and of noble bearing. Doubtless, as a good

Franciscan, he begged his bread as he went along, a bag and stick his sole outfit. His intention was to go to Marseilles, and there take ship for Syria ; but he only got as far as Avignon. There a mysterious voice arrested his steps.

On his arrival he had gone to see a celebrated recluse, named Marie Amante, or Amente. It was customary for travellers to go and salute these recluses, to make them some offering, and ask for their prayers. Built into their cells, their only communication with the outer world was by means of a wicket, through which food was passed to them. As a rule, they were held in great respect, the towns where they lived taking a special pride in them ; and in those days, when men gladly delegated to others, whenever possible, the penances necessary for their salvation, these ascetics were looked upon as benefactors and honoured accordingly. Their annals show us many notable travellers stopping at their gratings, while kings and princes—including Henri Quatre, who was acquainted with the last of them—sought for advice from those who had a special reputation for sanctity.

Henri de la Baume, therefore, presented himself at this wicket of Marie Amante. The recluse looked steadily at him for a long time, and asked him some questions as to the object of his journey : then, to the friar's great amazement, she said : " Messire pèlerin, it is not to Jerusalem you are to go. God has other designs in view for you ; that path is not the right one." He was not only surprised, but disturbed, for the recluse was said to be very holy and to receive communications from heaven. She requested that he would come to see her the next day ; meanwhile she would spend the night



in prayer. On his return, in order to convince him that she was inspired by a power greater than herself, she revealed to him certain facts of his life known to himself alone ; afterwards explaining to him the mission which he was to undertake. At Corbie, in Picardy she told him, there was a young girl named Colette, like herself a recluse for several years, who was destined for great things. But Colette, unassisted, could not accomplish the important work for which God had chosen her, and it was the pilgrim to Jerusalem, Henri de la Baume, who was to go to her help. He must therefore turn his steps to Picardy with as little delay as possible, and, having procured the necessary assistance, place himself at Colette's disposal. "Turn towards the north," said Marie Amante, "those footsteps previously directed towards the sea ; thither lies the right road ; and may God assist you !"

Sylvère d'Abbeville, the historian who relates these facts—doubtless according to the recollection of Père Henri himself—throws on them no further light. To him it was a case of supernatural intervention and no other explanation was required. At the same time, it is quite probable that Marie Amante had been informed of Colette's ideas and wishes by the Franciscans, whose "visitors" were constantly going from province to province ; and that she had often wished to be able to send some one who would be of assistance to this unknown sister-recluse. Or had Henri de la Baume—fervent spirit in a relaxed monastery—been himself considering the possibility of reforming the order to which he belonged—thus following the example given at the very time by the monastery of Mirabeau in Poitou, and by several Italian



monasteries? It is not at all improbable. However, having said all this, and also noted a point often forgotten, namely, the condition of travel incidental to the Middle Ages, when there were few main routes and all travellers stopped at the same places—having allowed for all these external agencies, we find ourselves in the dim region of inspirations, of happy meetings, of fortunate chances, which Divine Providence directs or makes use of. At all events, Henri de la Baume was much impressed by this occurrence. He “turned towards the north” the eyes which had been looking towards the south; he retraced his footsteps, travelling over the same road, and returned to Savoy. And, before taking any further steps, he went to relate his strange experiences to his patroness, Blanche de Genève.

Blanche was what was known in those times as “*une puissante dame*.” She was the sister of Pope Clement VII. Her father, Amadeus III., who died in 1367, and who was the second last Count de Genevois, owned the important territory (held in vassalage from the House of Savoy), which extended from the south of Geneva and of which the principal towns were Annecy, La Roche, Rumilly, and Thones. His wife was Mahaut of Boulogne, and they had a family of four sons and five daughters. The sons were Aimé IV., Janus, Peter, and Robert—that same Robert of Geneva who became pope under the name of Clement VII. None of these sons had an heir; and it was a son of his daughter Marie, by her second husband, Humbert de Thoire-Villars, who subsequently inherited the estates. Jeanne married Raymond de Beaux, Prince of Orange; Blanche is she with whom we are concerned at present; Catherine married Aimé de

Savoie-Achaïe ; Yolande married Aimery, Vicomte de Narbonne.

Blanche's husband had died about 1390. He was Hugues de Chalon-Arlay, and belonged to the Chalon family, then one of the most influential in France.\* His countess seems to have been a woman of real benevolence, a powerful protectress to those in whom she was interested, and at the same time a princess tenacious of what she considered her rights, and not at all easily hoodwinked.

It was only the result of a strong protest that she and her sister were allowed to retain the title of Countesses of Geneva. Their nephew and heir, Thoire-Villars, having paid over their share of the inheritance, amounting to two thousand florins, for which the castles of la Roche, la Batie, and la Balme, had been security, and having in 1400 exchanged these estates for the lands of Rumilly and of Cessens, sold during the following year the territory of the Counts of Geneva to Amadeus VIII., Duke of Savoy. Blanche, however, insisted on retaining until 1417 the name of Genève, of which her family had been deprived, and continued to do homage for it to the Bishop of Geneva. At the time that we meet her first, she must have been about fifty years old ; and she appears across the centuries as a "*maîtresse femme*," a woman of strong character, rather tall, with a dowager's traditional air of somewhat despotic benevolence.

It was at Rumilly that she received the Franciscan friar, and she immediately began to arrange with him the best means of giving effective help to Colette of Corbie. With this object in view, she desired Henri de la Baume

\* Another branch became, by a subsequent marriage, the family of the princes of Nassau and of Orange.

to call upon a pious woman whom she knew at Besançon, Isabeau de Rochechouart—the rich and childless widow of the Baron de Brissay, who had devoted her life to works of charity. Armed with a letter for Madame de Brissay, he turned his steps towards Besançon, and there found a more than willing helper. The Baronne de Brissay showed the deepest interest in the pious enterprise; she placed herself and her possessions unreservedly at the service of the good work; and after a few days the arrangements for their journey to Corbie were complete. The Baronne de Brissay set out with a small train of attendants, Père de la Baume accompanying them as chaplain. It was then July. They estimated that it would take them twenty days to go across Champagne and la Brie.

What were their plans? or had they any definite plans at all? Most probably not. They intended merely to place themselves at the disposal of a pious woman, see her, and, if she had designed any good works, to do their best to assist her to carry them out. They felt that they were going on a kind of spiritual adventure, such as must sometimes be undertaken in order that the mysterious ways of God may be accomplished. From a material point of view their journey to Colette was, for her, a necessity. If she was to undertake a mission, she must have help and support; no enterprise, no matter how entirely religious, could be carried out without some influence and some money. For every journey, for every new experiment, one required to have powerful sources of protection and security. France was ravaged by wars, terrorised by roving bands of pillagers, and there was no freedom or liberty of action anywhere, neither land on which to build nor even roads on which to walk.

Colette was then twenty-four years old. For the previous four years she had been enclosed in a cell, constructed for her between two buttresses of the little Church of Notre Dame de Corbie ; and these four years of solitude, prayer and mortification, had been fruitful in remarkable inspirations. It had been impressed on her mind that she must set to work to renew the fervour of what was known to her as "*la religion de Saint Francois*"—that is to say, the Order which the "Poverello" had founded. By visions and by an interior impulse which she found it impossible to deny or to resist, she had been convinced of the necessity for undertaking this work, immensely difficult though it clearly was. No doubt these inspirations, these mysterious instructions, may sound strangely to the modern sceptic ; nevertheless, we must accept them as facts. Joan of Arc, a few years later, was to visualise—and to carry out—the idea of saving a whole country, and of placing the King of France on his throne. Colette, cut off completely from the world, a young girl of humble birth and no education, fixed her whole mind on the great Orders of the seraphic Francis and on a reform of them to be brought about by her feeble hands. The injunctions she received might seem obscure ; they were, nevertheless, quite definite, emphatic and positive ; while, as proof that they were genuine, we know that, at a time when Colette was filled with anxious doubts as to whether this formidable task was for her really a matter of conscience, various holy persons entirely unknown to her, were actually setting out from a distant country to assist in its accomplishment.



If the world had known anything of the matter, how

absurd the projects of these people would have seemed ! They, however, were making their way hopefully towards Corbie, where they were to find a woman with whom none of them were acquainted, but in whom they already believed absolutely. She herself had no thought of anything except her future mission ; how it was to be accomplished she did not know, but she was preparing herself for everything, strengthening her mind and her will for a great enterprise.

In the month of July, 1406, Henri de la Baume, the Baroness de Brissay and their attendants arrived at the gates of Corbie. They made quite a little procession. There were two carriages, some mules, and people on foot. The town bestirred itself. Whom, then, were these strangers coming to see ? Their first visit was to the parish priest, Jean Guyot, who turned out to be Colette's confessor. In reply to their questions, he praised the recluse in the highest terms, and brought them at once to her cell. A curious crowd followed the visitors ; other people looked on from their houses. The cell, which adjoined the church, stood in an open space. It was no surprise to the townspeople to find that the strangers were going to see Colette. They were by no means the first who had come from a distance to talk to her. It had, in fact, become necessary to make an appointment in order to enjoy that favour. So many were there, both from the town and elsewhere, who wished to take counsel with this holy woman and tell her their troubles, that she had been much embarrassed by them ; and the parish priest of Corbie had, at her request, limited her conversations with seculars to two hours a day. She was, in truth, known far and wide, and to

numberless women, young and old, she had been a source of light and strength.

Jean Guyot presented himself at her wicket, telling Colette of the visitors who had come to her, and of their object in doing so.

At this news, Colette was overcome with joy. These unknown helpers, then, had themselves found their way to her secluded cell ! All the great work of which she had had a glimpse, that great apostolate which had appeared so impossible to a solitary and helpless woman, was proved no vain dream or illusion, since these good people believed in it and had come to help her. Her fears and doubts could have had no more convincing reply. A few days previously she had lacked courage to leave the solitude she loved so well, to face the world's turmoil instead of a life of solitude and contemplation. Now, all at once, came the needful energy. Mystical writers tell us that the saints realise and reproduce in their lives the actions of Christ. On the day of the Visitation, in the presence of the sisterly affection which understood her and was the first to salute in her a hidden mystery, the Mother of Christ cried out : " My soul doth magnify the Lord ! " In the same way Colette, in the presence of these heaven-sent visitors, gave praise to God out of a heart filled with happiness.

Her next step was daring, almost unheard of. She who had been built in for four years there and then caused the door of her hermitage to be thrown down by the attendants of Madame de Brissay. The two visitors then went into Colette's wretched little room and, overcome by emotion, they wept together.

An endless future of vicissitudes and of hope went with



them into that narrow cell. This final stage of a long journey was only the beginning of a very different pilgrimage. Outside, the crowd pressed around ; some, no doubt, succeeding in getting a glimpse of the mysterious retreat,—so small and so bare. But the portion opened by Colette was the least interesting, being only the outer room, from which the oratory was separated by another door. Without concerning themselves about those who were listening, Colette and Père Henri began to celebrate the praises of God, somewhat like the brothers of St. Francis, who, as the *Fioretti* tells us, recited aloud the praises of God as they journeyed over the mountains and along the roads. Then Colette went to pray alone ; first giving thanks to God, who from three distant provinces had brought together these people to work for His glory : then unreservedly offering herself and all her energies to the divine service, “ I dedicate myself,” she said, “ in health, in illness, in my life, in my death, in all my desires, in all my deeds ; so that I may never work henceforth except for your glory, for the salvation of souls, and towards the reform for which you have chosen me. Henceforth there is nothing which I am not prepared to undertake for love of you.”

These were not idle words. Colette, with all her gentleness, was to reveal herself, when necessary, as a woman of strong, almost violent, determination. Herein, no doubt, lay the secret of the ascendancy which she gained over all who came in contact with her. She possessed, says one of her biographers, “ a mind full of strength, of resource, and of persuasive power.” During the next few days the three servants of God were maturing their plans. Colette was to go to the pope and ask his



permission to enter the Franciscan Order, for the purpose of reforming it and reviving its fervour. Obviously, therefore, the first step to be taken was to have her vow of enclosure annulled, so that she should be able to leave her hermitage. Now the only one who could give this dispensation was the Papal Legate for France. Père Henri and the Baroness undertook to try and obtain it, and for this purpose set out for Paris. As a result of her conversations with Colette, Madame de Brissay had become entirely devoted to her. The wisdom of the young saint, her clear intellect, her charm of manner, her strong conviction that she had a certain good work to do, her grasp of the means by which it was to be accomplished, and, finally, her radiant spirituality, had won to her service for ever the soul of the generous Baroness. To the work of Franciscan reformation, Madame de Brissay henceforward devoted her personal services, her influence, and her money. She believed implicitly in Colette, as, indeed, did all those came under her influence or heard her speak. She and Père de la Baume succeeded in obtaining the requisite permission from the Apostolic Nuncio, Cardinal Jean de Chalant. By his direction, the Bishop of Amiens sent to Corbie one of his vicars to examine into the reasons put forward by the recluse as to why she should be released from her vows. Receiving a favourable report, and having, on July 24th, obtained the legate's authority, he gave the dispensation. It was signed on the 1st August, and published and promulgated in the town of Corbie on the 3rd. All this had not been accomplished without great efforts and difficulties; and it would seem that Madame de Brissay had been obliged to work very hard ("*labourer*" is the word she uses) in

order to attain her object so quickly and completely. Pierre de Reims\* writes that she herself was "amazed at the way in which God had helped them in getting out Colette, notwithstanding all impediments and objections, the which by human means could not be annulled in so brief a time, and nevertheless were forthwith removed and overcome." The greater number of these objections had been raised by the Benedictines of Corbie. Colette was under their jurisdiction, belonged to them in a sense, and the Abbot of Corbie, Dom Raoul de Roye, was by no means pleased at the departure of their young saint, who shed so much lustre on the monastery. The town of Corbie was of the same mind as the abbot. The people were extremely indignant that the recluse should leave them; and forthwith arose a spirit of opposition from which Colette was destined later on to suffer much.

On their return to Corbie, Père Henri and Madame de Brissay began to organise the long journey which was to bring them from Picardy to Nice. It was there Pope Benedict XIII. was residing at the time. No religious reform could be undertaken without papal approbation. This had been foreseen by Blanche de Genève from the time of Henri de la Baume's first visit; and she herself had suggested to him that she should introduce the suppliant to Benedict XIII., the successor to her brother, Clement VII. This was all the easier for her just then, from the fact that Nice, where the sovereign pontiff hap-

\* Pierre de Reims or Pierre de Vaux. Both these names are given him on the documents; the first seems to be the one most generally employed by his contemporaries, notably by Sister Perrine de la Balme, whose manuscript is, together with that of Pierre de Reims, the most direct source of all that has been written about St. Colette.

pened to be, had recently been attached to the Duchy of Savoy ; and he would therefore scarcely refuse a request coming from any one of her family.\*

\* \* \*

One August day, in 1406, the little company set out. There was a carriage for the Baroness de Brissay, and a mule which was utilised sometimes for one member of the party, sometimes for another. The whole town of Corbie, murmuring and disconsolate, was present at the departure. What were they to think of it? Many of the women wept.

Arrived at Paris, the travellers made a short stay in order to pay their respects to the Cardinal Legate. Then they turned their steps to Dijon, where Colette, presented by the Baroness de Brissay, was received by the Duchess of Burgundy. This was Margaret of Bavaria, wife of John the Fearless—"Jean sans Peur." During the two years since the death of Philip the Bold, the House of Burgundy, with this determined and far-seeing man, this "*tête carrée*," at its head, had become more and more powerful. The provinces of Brabant and Limburg, which were Margaret of Bavaria's dowry, had increased its wealth, and the Duke's personality made it much more formidable. It was during the preceding year that he had caused the dauphin, Charles VII., to be carried off at Juvisy, afterwards taking him under his own guardianship.

Duchess Margaret received Colette with a benevolence which soon developed into deep admiration, and between

\* Amadeus VII., called "le Roux" (red-haired) Duke of Savoy, had received the allegiance of the territory of the Counts of Nice in 1391.

these two women an unusual friendship sprang up. All during her subsequent life, and in all her difficulties, Colette could rely on the support and the generosity of the Duchess of Burgundy, who in her turn, when in any trouble, used to send for Colette in order to receive sympathy and consolation. At Bourg-en-Bresse, another important personage was expecting Colette, the young Count of Savoy, Amadeus VIII., who later on had the misfortune to be chosen for pope by the schismatic council at Basle.

Thus the great ones of this world were already to be found meeting Colette, and the widespread inter-communications which she established with all the important people of her time began without delay from the moment she stepped out of her tiny hermitage in Picardy.

Of the rest of this journey, which lasted for a month, we know nothing except that it was full of difficulties. There was war all around. Armagnac and Burgundian were at each other's throats. As between England and France Burgundy had declared a neutrality which France looked upon as treason ; and the English soldiers were over-running France. They had penetrated—and been killed—as far away as Perigueux. The Chancellor of the Parliament, Arnaud de Corbie, when ordered by the king to join him at Gien-sur-Loire, confided to the Assembly that he did not at all like the idea of the journey. He felt sure that it would be very dangerous indeed. “ For,” he groaned, “ it is said that Monseigneur le Duc de Bourgogne has surrounded the country of Flanders, being supported in the country of Picardy and of Champagne by a very great number of men-at-arms ; and nobody knows what are his intentions.” Armed bands

of men, of regulars and irregulars, pillaged everywhere ; it was the era of the " Ravageurs," the " Effrois," the " Tuchins " of Auvergne. The taste for burning and levying toll was to be found in all ranks. When the armies had driven back the English somewhat, they stayed in the country and pillaged it. Communications were dangerous, the highways unsafe, travelling very expensive. Besides these graver matters, there were many annoyances to be faced, very few bridges, bad roads, food scarce and exorbitantly dear.

Colette did not worry about anything. She appeared like one who was not of this world. As a rule she went on foot, conversing with those who were near her about holy things, and beseeching of them to love God. " And was," says Pierre de Reims, " of so beautiful an appearance and of such virtuous conversation, that it seemed to them that it was an angel come down from heaven whom they were accompanying."

" Sometimes," says the chronicler, " through pity and compassion, and because she was young and tender, they put her sitting on the beast ; and because she never was idle, she occupied herself in thinking or speaking of Our Lord. Immediately that she was seated on the beast, she turned her heart so vividly to the thought of God that it seemed as if she was entirely carried away and transfigured in Him, and knew not what was said nor what was done beside her. And nevertheless held herself so steadily, without leaning to one side or the other, that it seemed as if the angels upheld her. At times, when she was going on foot, and when she was on a rough and difficult road, full of stones, many times it seemed as if she did not touch the earth, sometimes as if she was

flying or that she was raised up in the air ; and thus, in a short time, she covered the ground so quickly that no one, no matter how strong or how good a walker they were, could keep up with her." \*

Nice was at this time a small town, surrounded by ramparts, and consisting of what is now known as the "old town." Its outstanding feature was its strong fortifications, subsequently much strengthened by the Dukes of Savoy, and not without reason, as the town was always a much coveted possession. The castle dominated it ; numerous towers crowned the ramparts, which afforded shelter to many convents and noble mansions. The Franciscans, however, had their convent outside the walls, on the banks of the Paillon. It was an immense building ; four years previously a chapter had been held there by no less than two hundred friars, come from Piedmont, Liguria, Provence, and Languedoc. It seems probable that the pope, who belonged to the Franciscan Order, was living in this convent, and that it was there he gave audience to Colette. So at least tradition says. On the other hand, Benedict XIII., when preparing to come to Nice, had given orders that the castle was to be put in order and provisioned. So that we really do not know in which place he held his court. Sometimes, as at Genoa, he used to put his attendants and officers to lodge at the castle, while he himself stayed at the monastery of the sons of St. Francis.

It was only since the previous spring that Benedict XIII. had been residing at Nice ; it was a stage in the nomadic life which he was then leading. This Pedro de Luna, this small, spare, dark-visaged Spaniard, is a

\* Pierre de Reims (Poligny MS.).



very baffling study. At times he is determined, shrewd, full of stately dignity, in everything the great nobleman from Arragon ; then suddenly he becomes crafty and subtle as a jurist. He had indeed for a time been Professor of Canon Law at the University of Montpellier. As Cardinal-Ambassador in Arragon, in Navarre, he had been marvellously successful as a negotiator ; while at all times he had remained a good religious, faithful to the Franciscan rule. Froissart and Nicholas of Clamanges even speak of his " holiness." He had little happiness or peace on his doubtful pontifical throne. Eight years had elapsed since he had been elected pope by the adherents of Clement VII., and had sworn to do all in his power to bring about unity in the Church ; and during that time France, anxious for this unity, tried by every means to make him abdicate. For four years she had refused him her obedience. By means of the men-at-arms of Boucicaut she had besieged him at Avignon, then shut him up there ; she had contested his nominations and hindered him when he wished to raise taxes. In spite of all, Benedict XIII. refused to yield. Three years later, having escaped from Avignon, he had wandered across Provence. Subsequently he had established himself at the Abbey of St. Victor, at Marseilles. And there, being again free and again a ruler, he set himself to regain the obedience of France, and not of France alone ; he also hoped to win back the north of Italy, and some day to possess Rome itself, by re-uniting in his own hands the warring sections of the Church. Is it really possible for a man to be, in all sincerity, a good monk, a religious vowed to detachment, and yet to be so tenacious of a great dignity ? In Pedro de Luna we are confronted with this problem.



Himself a Professor of Canon Law, he had long and minutely studied the origin of the schism, and he held that his pontifical line was the true one. He had—and doubtless in good faith—come to consider his title as successor of St. Peter as so unquestionable that he asked himself if he even had the right to break the legitimate succession, by renouncing the tiara! He indeed suggested this singular theme for the discussion of jurists. What extraordinary blindness, in face of the desperate evils arising from the divisions in the Church, from the disruption of Christianity itself! And during all this time, both he and his rival, Gregory XII., while professing to seek some way out of the difficulty, were multiplying hindrances and reasons for delaying reunion.

“Benedict XIII.,” said Ameilh de Breuil, “comes from the country of good mules; once they are on the road, you might flay them before they would turn back for you.” He, at all events, would never “turn back.” From Marseilles he set out towards Nice, which the Duke of Savoy had placed at his disposal. He arrived there after an overland journey of twenty days, while his baggage, personal belongings, books and archives followed by sea. He remained for some months at Nice, preparing for his expedition to Genoa—by negotiations, by spending money, and by making himself agreeable to the princes. His idea was to recapture the affections of the Genoese and, once secure in Liguria, to gain over Pisa and possibly Florence. At Easter, 1405, there came to him the six galleys, partly Catalonian, partly Genoese, which he had chartered. With a strong sense of the value of display, he sailed in great pomp and magnificence towards Genoa, receiving homage at the ports of Monaco, Albenga and

Savona. Genoa gave him a superb and enthusiastic reception. But he remained there only until the following autumn, when he withdrew to Savona, partly on account of the unsanitary state of Genoa, where dysentery was raging, and disappointed besides in the attitude of the Princes of Arragon and of France, who did not support his projects of conquering Rome. So from town to town he went, until he at last reached Nice, ever retreating before the Ligurian miasma—one of those vague pestilences of the Middle Ages of which neither the name nor the remedy was known, but which overran regions and left them desolate.

Once back in Nice, Benedict applied all his shrewd knowledge of human nature to the task of preparing for the interview with his rival, Innocent VII. (successor to Gregory XII.) to which he had agreed in order to please the princes, and which was destined to lead to nothing.

In the midst of all these political intrigues and cares of state, how insignificant does Colette appear, as she journeys from Picardy to speak to the pope, seated on a mule, and escorted by a kindly old lady and a Franciscan friar !

Nevertheless, this pope, so immersed in perplexities and intrigues, shows himself truly great and religious when he comes to deal with her request. This month of September was an interval of rest in his troubled life. It seemed as if the religious, the friar minor, reappeared in him in the presence of this humble, eager woman, speaking to him of his own order, of St. Francis, and asking his permission to renew the early Franciscan fervour. Whatever the pontiff may have been in other circumstances, his attitude on this occasion was lofty, almost inspired.

Very probably Colette would never have succeeded in making herself heard by so exalted a personage if she had not had the assistance of Blanche of Geneva. This princess did not forget her promise of interesting herself in the proposed reform. Her attendants and some of the ladies of her court went to meet Colette at Dijon, and accompanied her for the rest of the way ; and one of these ladies was sent on in advance to solicit an audience with the pope and to prepare the way as far as she could for Colette.

And, most disconcertingly, while on her way, this unfortunate ambassadress became suddenly insane !

We are told by the chronicler that she had always been "*notable et discrete*." But, whether from madness or (as is suggested) diabolical possession, she began to rave wildly, her demeanour becoming disorderly and her behaviour most unseemly. We are not surprised to hear that "respectable people" were scandalised, and kept away from her. One sole idea remained fixed in her distraught consciousness ; that of her mission, which, despite her madness, she succeeded in accomplishing. But what an inauspicious preparation this was for the coming of Colette ! The saint, indeed, attributed this hindrance to the devil. For the message received by the pope was, that a woman who had lost her senses demanded to see him instantly. The pope, more charitable than the "respectable people," consented to admit to his presence this woman who had—so oddly—as it seemed—been sent to him by the Countess of Geneva. And strange to relate, as soon as she came before him, she appeared to recover her senses ; and with clearness and intelligence she stated the wishes of the little company who

were coming to see him, and told him all she knew concerning Colette. The pope was much interested in her story ; and once Colette had found a resting-place in Nice, in a convent of Cistercian nuns (in the place now known as the Monastîé) her interview with the pope was quickly arranged.

The audience was a solemn and impressive one. Benedict XIII. was surrounded by cardinals. " Colette," says Pierre de Reims, " had prayed as she was accustomed, recommending to God herself and her doings," and then she had gone forward " in good simplicity, confidence and great humility, her eyes cast down and her heart elevated to God on high ; the venerable Father and the noble lady and several other notable persons going with her."

Then a very extraordinary thing happened. " When she arrived into the presence of the Holy Father, and as she raised her eyes to look at him with sweetness and to salute him with gentleness, a wonderful thing happened ; for, before the said handmaiden of the Lord, from the height of the throne on which he was seated, he fell to the ground, thus filling her heart with great fear."

What unlooked-for agitation had disturbed the soul of the pontiff, causing him to kneel before this young girl as she came into his presence ? What was there in the youthful countenance of the Saint, to inspire this sudden veneration ?

Colette remained standing before him, at some distance. Being assisted to his feet, the pope advanced towards her, to the great surprise of all who were present, and took from her hands the wallet which she carried hanging from her leathern belt ; this being the usual way

of presenting the scroll on which one's requests or petitions were written down.

This scroll had been drawn up by Colette in her hermitage ; it contained a statement of what she believed to be divine communications regarding the reform of the Franciscan Order, together with her request for the approbation which she sought.

Benedict XIII. unfolded the scroll and made himself acquainted with the various " memorials " in the petition. Then he questioned Colette and conversed with her in the most friendly way.

Thus quietly ended this remarkable interview. Others, however, followed. During the period between this audience and the formal approbation, Colette was several times sent for by the Holy Father. He wished to know thoroughly the work of this gifted soul before giving it publicly so signal a mark of his confidence ; accordingly he scrutinised and tested it.

What were Colette's requests ?

Here we cannot go astray ; in fact, explanations and surmises are unnecessary and even misleading, the documents themselves being precise and formal. She asks for two things :

1. To follow herself the apostolic and evangelical state according to the rule of St. Francis by entering the Second Order, which (as well as the First Order) had been founded by him.

2. To be authorised to undertake " the restoration and reformation of the Orders which St. Francis had instituted " (*la réparation et réformation des ordres que Monsieur Saint François institua*).

Colette uses the plural ; " *des ordres*." Her request—

that she might also reform the order of men—may appear presumptuous ; it is nevertheless quite definitely expressed. It is not merely a question of restoring the convent where she enters to the fervour of the earlier Franciscans. She intends to be, in the midst of the religious houses, as a radiant centre of light and heat, whereat the Friars Minor as well as the Poor Clares may find the purification of their vocations. She burns with zeal for the whole order of “ Monsieur Saint François,” and for the honour of the Church which she wishes to be upheld by the efficacy of the sons of the seraphic saint. She herself is not to be a cloistered nun, living in strict seclusion, but rather a hard-working servant going whithersoever she is needed. She is to be a wanderer, always on the road ; she is to found, to reform, to inspire, according as circumstances make it possible or opportune. Although specially dedicated to the convents of women because she is a woman, she will also interest herself in the convents of men, and will set before them, with the same authority and conviction, the standard to be followed.

Among the Friars Minor the authority of St. Colette has been the subject of much discussion. It has been urged, and not without reason, that the pope could not possibly have given a woman jurisdiction over an order of men. As a matter of fact, it was not a jurisdiction that Colette asked for, but rather the sanction for a certain moral, directive authority. It was as if the Church, by the voice of her Head, had said explicitly : “ Hear her and follow her.” He granted her twofold claim, acceded to both her requests in their entirety. St. Colette received explicit power and permission to promote a reform in the whole Order of St. Francis, according as



circumstances should be favourable. And in order to facilitate her mission in every way, Benedict XIII. gave her what might be described as a solemn letter of commendation.

However, all this was not done in a day. The pope, as was only right, wished to think the matter over. Among the cardinals, a strong current of opposition to Colette soon made itself felt. The first of her two requests—to live according to the strict rule of St. Francis—gave rise to nearly as many objections as the other; so many attempts had been made to revive this rule, and it was so undeniable that this “privilege of poverty” was very repugnant to human nature. No doubt these cardinals were prudent men; they saw before them this delicate young girl, “*cette jeune et tendre fille*,” and feared that her zeal might lead to bad results rather than good. They were certainly prudent; what reason had they for placing faith in this girl who, after all, was quite unknown and possibly of not quite sound mind? Therefore, they remonstrated strongly with the pope, raising various wise objections—all the more vigorously because they felt that Benedict XIII. had already made up his mind in Colette’s favour, and that they were struggling against a decision already taken. They were, in truth, very much annoyed.

Benedict indeed had made up his mind in favour of Colette—probably from the first moment that he had seen her. But he did not wish to appear precipitate; and he complied outwardly with the wishes of his cardinals by deferring his decision and continuing his inquiries. He also continued his conversations with Colette, whom he found amazingly enlightened.



During this time of suspense and doubt an unexpected ally came to Colette's help, cutting short these delays. The Ligurian fever, apparently borne on the east wind, made its appearance at Nice, "a great and fearful pestilence," says Pierre de Reims. And it so happened that some of the opposing cardinals, and those the most determined among them, succumbed to the malady. "So grievously affected that they quickly died." Like the Hebrews, the people of the Middle Ages were deeply penetrated with the idea of swift punishments coming from Almighty God, and liked to find preternatural explanations for striking calamities. The people of Nice decided that it was on account of having made unnecessary difficulties over a grave decision that the poor cardinals had died. At all events, it brought about a sudden change of front among the others. As often happens in the presence of death, they became inspired by a more lofty and supernatural spirit. Their prudence began to appear more like cowardice; and one of them, advanced in years, as Sœur Perrine tells us, at a council held in the presence of the Sovereign Pontiff, asked for permission to speak to him, and gave it as his opinion that they could not oppose Colette's wishes without opposing the Gospel itself, since it was "an evangelical mode of life" which she wished to embrace. All the others agreed to this opinion.

A few days afterwards Benedict XIII. declared that this young girl's projects seemed to him to be the work of God, and also that he himself intended to receive her as a religious of St. Francis. For several years she had belonged to the Third Order and had worn its habit. The pope dispensed in her case with any period of pro-

bation, on account of the great perfection to which she had attained.

On the appointed day, early in October, a large number of cardinals and other important people, ecclesiastical and secular, assembled around the pope. The ceremony, held in public, was very solemn. Benedict XIII., having preached a striking sermon on the religious state and the evangelical life, received Colette into the "religion" of St. Clare and made her a professed nun of the Order. Then he blessed her, and declared her Abbess and Mother of all who would accept her reform. He put, says Sœur Perrine, the veil on her head, girded her with the cord, and gave her the rule of St. Clare to keep. "I have heard Père Henri say," she adds, "that the Holy Father did all these things with great devotion and reverence. When the holy mystery was quite finished, he exhorted her benignly and gently, that she should be a wise and very prudent and good religious, observing well all that she had promised and vowed. And charitably offered himself to her to aid her and strengthen her in all her necessities, for the honour of God."

Then turning towards Henri de la Baume, he recommended Colette to him, enjoining him never to leave her and to provide for all her wants. Then he blessed him, and kissed his shoulder, saying, "Happy these shoulders which will carry the bread which she will eat." Then, aloud, and turning towards those who were present, he said: "Would to God that I was worthy to seek for and buy bread for this young girl to live on!" And then he desired the Lady of Brissay to bring back the nun gently and peaceably to her country.

Colette did not show, as we might expect, any triumph

in her expression. She seemed, in fact, entirely abstracted from the honours paid to her on that day. Later on she was astonished and unhappy when she found that she was accorded the respect due to an Abbess.

However, several solemn Papal Bulls followed quickly in confirmation of these privileges, the first being a Bull dated the XVII. of the Kalends of November, 1406, by which the pope invested Colette with large powers of spiritual direction over the brothers and sisters of the Order of Minors of St. Francis.

The Sovereign Pontiff showed a surprising trust in Colette. There are a few people for whom opportunities of action and of influence in the world thus seem to open up before they have given proof of their merit or ability. Many prove unworthy of this kindness of fortune; Colette was not one of these defaulters.

Later on, much later on, having done, according (as it would seem) to his lights, his part by weary and toilsome work to save a France which in those first years of the century was drawing near to Agincourt, and a Church which was drifting towards a schismatic council and a third rival pope, Benedict XIII., discrowned and deserted, was to end his melancholy days in a Spanish fortress. Alone, except for three cardinals, now, like himself, outside the living hierarchy of the Church, he persisted to the end, like one blind or insane, in exercising a power now the vainest of phantoms. But, looking back on the years that were gone, and on the deeds which he had succeeded in accomplishing, he might well count among the fruitful days of his life those on which he had entrusted with a great mission the young girl from Corbie

who had inspired him with so noble a faith and so singular a confidence.



What special need, we may ask, existed just then for the reform of the Franciscan Order, so earnestly desired by some of its members? How far did its condition justify a movement of which Colette's attempt was only one manifestation, and of which indications are found at this time in two other regions, Poitou and the north of Italy? St. Francis had founded his "religion" in 1207; it is now 1405. We must study its developments during those three centuries in order to discover how far Colette's enterprise was needed and justified.

Among the numerous documents relating to the Orders of Friars Minors, there are none giving a really impartial account. We find ourselves confronted with a discursive and complex history, which each different section of the Order interprets according to its own traditions. But, as a centre point amid this whirl of events, dominating and explaining them, appears the figure of St. Francis, the radiant figure of the pilgrim consumed with divine love. Across the centuries we seem to see him—ever scornful and impatient of mediocrity or half-measures. He is ever the "madman of Assisi"; he insists on poverty carried to the point of destitution, on humility which becomes abasement, on detachment which rejoices in no earthly thing. In this ecstatic state he lived, and in it he wished each and all of his friars to live. Across the thirteenth century he passes like a fiery flame. His influence is enormous; his renown spreads everywhere. "Are you the Francis of whom everyone is talking?" he is asked as he journeys along. At a word from him, men

and women leave the world and gird themselves with the white cincture. He gathers together his first disciples in 1207 ; and in 1219 the religious of his order, assembled at Portiuncula, number several thousand ; five thousand, say some ; three, say others ; enough, at all events, to people a town. From all parts of Europe they have come to the magnificent Chapter called “ of Reeds ” or “ of Rush-mats,” because the friars had to build themselves huts of rushes to live in, all over the plain. Nevertheless, from that time onward, and to the very end of his life, St. Francis lost his gaiety. The light-hearted joy of his first mission was gone, of the time when it seemed to him that he had only to extol the name of Christ on the hill-tops in order to bring men back to the Divine Model whom they had forgotten. The friars were, in truth, not all that he had hoped for. Some years previously he had found it necessary to resign his function of general guide of the Order, because his brethren thought him too severe. He had to submit to see his rule, his beloved rule, which he had wished to be clear and straightforward, tempered and explained away. Instead of a precept, gentle yet terrible, it becomes a long, a complex “ *modus vivendi*.” Later on, when he writes his last testament, we find him imploring that to it at least they will make neither addition nor gloss ; that it will not be “ interpreted ” or paraphrased, but simply carried out, just as it is.\* St. Francis died with a deep sorrow in his heart ; just as we often see an innocent child sob itself to sleep. He opened the Gospel at random, seeking there some word of hope ; three times did the book open at the chapters of the Passion. Suffering was, then, to be his lot to the end.

\* *Life of St. Francis of Assisi.* By Joergensen.

And thereupon all that was heroic in him showed itself ; it was while lying on a mattress, suffering intensely from dropsy, and transpierced by the pains of the stigmata, that he composed the glorious " Song of the Sun." Marvellous triumph of the soul over human weakness !

Even during his lifetime, ever since 1221, there had been a certain slackening of discipline. Many of the provinces of the order, and especially those of France, were so far away that the influence of the saint could not make itself felt, and occasional " visitations " were not sufficient to counteract the tendency to relaxation. Some of the brethren cast off the religious habit, others used to ramble uncontrolled hither and thither ; others again lived quite too comfortably in the friaries, " with a slack rein," as Père Fodéré says. Even earlier still, during his own generalship, when one would have expected the whole Order to be inflamed with holy zeal, even then the converts were becoming less strict. Those in France were accepting bequests, annuities, pensions ; in various seignorial deeds there are numerous records of donations made to them. St. Francis intended that the friars should own nothing, should live by their work and by alms, looking on such dwellings as they found only as precarious possessions ; having no rights of property and no security for the future. Was this really possible ? It was certainly the ideal of St. Francis. And the whole history of the Franciscan Order was to be that of these antagonistic tendencies—of the efforts made by its sons, some to reach this ideal, others to reduce it to " plain commonsense."

The double current has been always discernible. Sometimes the brethren adapt themselves to the life



of their day, become proprietors, assume ownerships, show themselves prudent and far-seeing; and then all at once the thought of their founder, their father, thrills through some heart. "No! this is not the life he intended for his disciples! The ideal set before us by Francis has been disowned, dishonoured. He bequeathed to us a heritage of humility and poverty; and behold, we live in ease and comfort." And, to console their Seraphic Father, some of them arise, take up again the staff and cord, seek for lonely grottos and eat the bread of mendicancy. These are the "Spirituals" the "Zealots," the "Fratricelli," later on the great branch known as the Observants, with Nicolà di Trinci at its head; and, later on still, the Capuchins. Some of these are saints, some are honestly seeking the light; some end as rebels. But in every case their breaking-away from the main order has arisen from zeal for the original, heroic ideal, neglected, disowned.

The regulations necessarily made by the popes helped to complicate things, still more; the *Bullarium Franciscanum*\* contains a large number of documents, where-through one sees the constant intervention of the Popes in both the interior and exterior life of the Order. In the beginning, and afterwards at certain dates which mark turning points in the history of Franciscan discipline, they intervene principally to restore to their original form rules which had been modified by the friars themselves; to regularise the irregularities which had been introduced; to sanction various modifications and exceptions. A time was to come when the strict observance of the vow of poverty would even

\* *Bullarium Franciscanum*. Published by Sbaralea.



be considered a privilege: *privilegium paupertatis*.\* As might be expected, these successive authorisations by the Popes were a constant source of differences between the "zealous" and the "relaxed" and between the various branches of their following. "Is not the sanction of the Pope," say some, "a complete justification?" "But," say the others, "can we be wrong in carrying out strictly the rule of our Founder?"

And there are just two points round which these reforms and abuses always centre—poverty and studies.

Sometimes it is luxury in clothing which is denounced, sometimes the "reserves and provisions" stored up in the granaries and store-rooms. Think of Franciscans with well-stocked cellars! with horses and stables! Occasionally things reach a very acute stage. In 1313, the then general, Gundifalus, when visiting the convents, insisted that all bequests and gifts should be returned to their owners, and cancelled all the contracts by means of which the convents had ensured their maintenance. A good many of the convents submitted and did as he directed. But having tried to introduce the same reforms into the convent at Paris, he was found hanging there one morning, strangled to death. Sometimes the pope himself interfered, to try and bring back the order into more rigorous paths; and on account of its resistance, it was at least once in grave danger of being suppressed.†

As to the pursuit of knowledge, the point to be argued is more complicated. St. Francis set great store on his own want of learning, and that of his first disciples;

\* *History of the Order of St. Clare.* Lyon.

† Fodéré.

and one of his rare fits of anger was when he was shown at Bologna a "house of studies" which had been built for the Franciscans. At the same time he had a profound respect for the Sacred Scriptures, and put into the highest place among his friars those whose education qualified them to preach.\* The real truth was that he disliked the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself; that he looked on it with suspicion and fear as a possible danger to his disciples—an obstacle not only to perfect humility, but also to poverty. "Learned men" he said, "are great collectors of books." Now in the thirteenth century, books were a luxury; and besides, the natural corollary to books would be friars poring over manuscripts instead of friars occupied, as Francis wished, in seeking for sinners. Again, books would require secure libraries and spacious convents. So that material poverty and poverty of spirit would alike be threatened. For these reasons, St. Francis, who wished to be called "simple" begged of those friars who were illiterate not even to learn to read.

But in that thirteenth century, characterised by such eagerness and impetuosity, who could resist the widespread movement which was captivating all minds—an insatiable eagerness to learn, an intense emulation to excel in learning? The Church was in the very centre of that movement, in some places merely associating herself with it, in others acting as a leader; for is not theology the greatest of all sciences, the most difficult, the most elevated, the richest (at that time) in literature? Universities were founded everywhere; Bologna, Paris, Oxford, are all centres of light. There existed an inter-

\* Joergensen. *Life of St. Francis of Assisi.*

national union, an inter-European communication such as has never been seen since ; the great centres of study contend for eminent professors ; the great teachers move about from one university to another according to the offers made to them and the reputation of the places where they are asked to teach. It is difficult to feel any deep regret that the Friars Minor, like the other great orders, decided not to remain outside this intellectual life. Must we not rejoice at their decision when we think of the many great works which were undertaken by them : when we remember that Jean de Fidanza was a Franciscan?—the saint who, under the name of Bonaventure, was the intellectual brother of St. Thomas Aquinas, both receiving on the same day the doctor's berretta at the University of Paris, both often afterwards found discoursing together on those sublime subjects in which both excelled.

Often, unfortunately, it was academic titles and dignities which were sought for rather than knowledge. According to a saying of the time people were not satisfied with being "docti" they must also be "doctores." Of course, at a time when learning was so much prized, university distinctions led to all sorts of honours.

Père Euhel, who continued the publication, begun by Sbaralea, of the Papal Bulls referring to the Franciscans Order (*Bullarium franciscanum*) sums up as follows in the *Annales Bollandistes* his observations on the period of which we are writing ; 1378-1431.

"It dismays one to find how, during these fifty-three years, ecclesiastical dignities were rained down on the order of St. Francis. More than three hundred of its members were advanced to the episcopate. In the

apostolic palaces, a crowd of others were to be found, filling the office of chaplain or some other position of honour. The example thus set in the highest quarters, found many imitators. Everywhere prelates and secular princes sought to have near them, as chaplains or secretaries, several sons of the Seraphic Patriarch. These misplaced religious deteriorated through their contact with worldly life; they lost the habit of the stern virtues of the cloister. Insubordination towards their religious superiors was sometimes the least of their faults; they were to be met everywhere walking around in dangerous idleness.

“ Another stumbling block equally dangerous was the ambition to possess academic distinctions. Side by side with religious eminent in virtue and learning, there were others who were neither learned nor virtuous, but who manoeuvred for the title of “ master ” in sacred theology, merely in order to smooth for themselves the path to the episcopate, or in order to enjoy immunities and privileges which would exempt them from many disagreeable restraints of monastic life and enable them to breathe the air of liberty at their ease.

“ The Order itself began to feel it a point of honour to be able to show a large number of ‘ doctors.’ This led to intrigues, dangerous tolerations and other failings, leading to disastrous consequences, of which we get a glimpse in the severe indictment of Pope Boniface IX. And later on, Pope Benedict XIII. is found congratulating some distinguished friars minor of Oviedo on having refused the doctorate in theology.”

On the whole, the fears of St. Francis had been justified. And it is worth noting that the enemies of the Franciscan

Order frequently exerted their ingenuity in demonstrating a contradiction between the love of knowledge, and the love of poverty ; ironically calling on them to renounce either one profession or the other. The very people who reviled the friars and declared that their lives as mendicants were contrary to the Gospel, tried at the same time to deprive them of access to the universities. The libellous work of Guillaume de Saint Amour : *Tractatus de periculis novissimorum temporum* did, as a matter of fact, succeed in getting them kept out for a time. But Pope Alexander IV. took up their cause and interceded with the King, St. Louis, so that both Jacobins and Cordeliers (Dominicans and Franciscans) had their privileges and rights restored.\*

From all this one might be tempted to conclude that the spectacle presented to the world by the Franciscan Order was not an edifying one. This, however, would be quite a mistake. Taken as a whole the order, which according to some writers numbered in the thirteenth century about two hundred thousand members† was generally regarded with very great respect : it occupied a notable position both in the Church and in the social world. Many saints adorned it ; some of great renown like St. Bonaventure, St. Antony of Padua, St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. John Capistran ; together with other saints less famous, but very numerous, who invigorated the whole order and were the best demonstration of its vitality. Always the friends of the poor, the Friars Minor were at the same time loved and protected by the great. "The nobles" says Fodéré, "were their buttress."

\* Fodéré.

† Hilaire de Barenton. *Les Franciscains en France.*

(arc-boutant). Indeed, very often the intervention of princes tempered the severity of the popes towards them. Scarcely anywhere was there king or noble who had not a mendicant friar, either Dominican or Franciscan, as his confessor. It seems, however, an exaggeration to say, as M. Simeon Luce does, that in France, during the period of the Burgundian and Armagnac parties, the two Orders allied themselves, one to each of these parties; the Franciscans taking sides with France and Armagnac against Burgundy; and to infer from this that they prepared the way and the final victory for Joan of Arc and her mission.\* But they undoubtedly came into close contact with the great ones of this world, they possessed much influence; and a great number of princes and still greater number of princesses were members of the Order itself.

The feminine half of the Franciscan Order, founded like the other by St. Francis with the assistance of St. Clare, had gone through much the same experiences.

Its foundress, Clare, daughter of Count Scefi, is a luminous figure among the saints. She never left Assisi, the place where she was born. On the day that Francis gave her the longed-for invitation she left the home of her parents, who never succeeded in bringing her back, and with some other young girls, set about imitating the life of the friars of St. Francis. They support themselves as mendicants on alms, living in a tiny, bare, monastery hidden away on the slopes of the mountain at Assisi. It was close to the great plain, which at that time was all forest, but which at the present moment can only boast of one solitary cypress in the midst of tillage. We

\* Siméon Luce. *Jeanne d'Arc à Domrémy*.



frequently find in the lives of the saints instances of their working two together, exemplifying in their sympathy and charity the ideal of mutual help among mankind ; men and woman united in spirit—a sort of resurrection of Paradise before the fall. Augustine and Monica, Benedict and Scholastica, Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal ; and in the same way St. Francis and St. Clare. St. Francis, who had a very human heart, experienced the greatest joy in seeing these women, representing the other half of humanity, praising God as the friars did. The little monastery of St. Damian, with St. Clare among her companions Pacifica Gueffuccio, Amata, Agnes de Spello, Christinia, Angeluccia, Benvenuta de Perugia, Balbina, Beatrice, Ortolana, was for him a place of delight and repose. Clare might be described as a mirror of St. Francis. She contemplated him, listened to him, and tried to imitate him. While she lived, the little monastery was all that “ little Brother Francis ” had desired ; fervent, strictly enclosed, joyous and utterly poor. But Clare died, a long time after the saint, and then this rigorous perfection deteriorated.

The novices, rapidly increasing in numbers, had spread everywhere ; from one end of Europe to the other were to be found monasteries of the “ Poor Ladies.” As in the case of the friars, gifts flowed in. Holy Poverty then became a “ privilege ” which certain convents obtained the right of observing ; while the others enjoyed the comforts of secure ownership.

The Order had been established in France in 1220. In accordance with the request of Alberic de Humbert, Archbishop of Reims, while in Rome in 1215, attending the council of Lateran, a little group of sisters was sent to

Reims. They were led by Marie de Braye, a native of Genoa, who carried in her hands the girdle of St. Clare, which already was looked on as a relic. With very great difficulty they had made their way from Assisi to Reims, and had installed themselves in wretched huts on the banks of the Vesle, in a disused cemetery belonging to the Canons of St. Denys at Reims. Thus they were truly, as St. Francis had wished, "strangers and pilgrims in this world." But it was difficult for such a state of things to last, at least in this form.

In 1250, Isabella of France, sister of St. Louis, founded a convent of Poor Clares at Longchamp. Finding the original rule very severe, she introduced various modifications, which were approved of by St. Bonaventure, then general of the order: her idea being to attract to the monastery the delicately reared and fragile daughters of noble houses. In this Isabella certainly succeeded. She obtained for her convent permission to own property and to accept revenues. The Pope, in 1258, confirmed these dispensations. Most of the nuns belonged to the French court. As with the rule of poverty, so also with that of enclosure, considerable concessions were made. Isabella had lay attendants at her call, and used to leave the monastery whenever she thought it would help on her own affairs or those of her convent. These exemptions did not however, interfere with the fervour of Longchamp, which always maintained a high reputation for piety. But the example of modifying the rule kept spreading. In 1264 at the request of St. Bonaventure, Urban IV. ordained uniformity among all the communities of Poor Clares, and the "common rule" which he established was a mitigated rule, one embodying all the relaxations

and dispensations granted to individual convents, and especially to Longchamp. A small number of convents, however, persisted in the observance of the original rule.

During all the thirteenth century the Franciscan Order of women flourished exceedingly. Many of its members were saints. Monasteries were to be found, not alone in France and Italy, where their members were considerable, but also in far distant Ireland, in remote Poland ; from the Scheldt to the Bosphorus ; along the Mediterranean, on Eastern and African shores alike. In order to make these foundations, the Poor Clares had of course to travel ; and thus the earlier abuses arose. It is hinted that the nuns travelled about rather too much ; in 1276 a whole community, driven from Roumania by the schismatic Greeks, took refuge in Rome, and there gave rise to scandal, so that Innocent V. was obliged to place them under Augustinian government. But it is the rule of poverty which suffers oftenest and most severely. Blessed Cunegunda, daughter of the king of Hungary and granddaughter of Theodore Lascaris, emperor of Constantinople, founded in her duchy of Cracow the monastery of Sandec, capable of containing a hundred religious ; Seventy of these she brought over with her when, being obliged to fly before the Tartars, then invading Poland, she took refuge on the borders of the Carpathians. At Naples, in 1310, Queen Sancha builds the immense convent of *Corpus Domini*, where two hundred nuns are housed. St. Elizabeth of Portugal founds the royal monastery of St. Clare at Coïmbra. Many convents are endowed and provided with incomes which increase according as their subjects become more numerous.

In the fourteenth century we find a general relaxation

of discipline. Dispensations from enclosure are granted—sometimes to princes to visit their relatives, sometimes for nuns to live outside their convent. Blanche, the daughter of St. Louis, had friars minor, doctors, surgeons, and blood-letters installed permanently at Longchamp. Two Poor Clares were attached to the person of Queen Beatrice of Portugal and lived in her palace. The abbess of a monastery in the diocese of Viviers, Lombarde de Chevaellis, wishing to vie with the rich abbesses of other Orders, made a display of pomp and dignity such as had never been known among the Poor Ladies. In Spain, at Valencia, the Poor Clares had Moorish slaves in their service.

With the exception of certain convents which, as we have said, remained faithful to their rule, this relaxation was at its height during the first years of the fifteenth century. The usual results had followed ; devout young girls, no longer attracted by a high ideal of perfection, preferred to live in the world, and the monasteries were becoming empty. Besides this, their former great wealth was soon to be a thing of the past. The ceaseless wars of the fifteenth century, the taxes which those wars made necessary, the pillaging, invasions, and ravages of armed bands, were soon to spread throughout the French churches and convents that “ great desolation ” of which we find evidence in numerous documents full of lamentations, complaints, and petitions to the mighty.\*

We may in short, sum up as follows the history of the two branches of the Seraphic Order, and of its Third Order, during the first two centuries of its existence.

\* Denifle. *La grande desolation des églises et monastères de France au quinzième siècle.*

Its membership was very large ; it had illustrious records both for piety and for work ; but from the outset fundamental causes of disagreement and disruption were at work. After the lofty flights of the thirteenth century came a gradual decline in the fourteenth century ; and these differences finding more scope under a relaxed discipline, there were in the first and second Orders constant attempts at a renovation of the interior life and a return to their original model ; the ideals of St. Francis and St. Clare being always before the minds of their disciples and causing among the more fervent a veritable nostalgia, an unbearable longing, for the true spirit of their founders.

Add to all this that the papal schism was responsible for many abuses. The rival popes maintained a rivalry of benevolence towards the religious, a regrettable seeking of support and popularity by special kindness ; add, furthermore, that the order was divided into two sections, with a General for each of the different " obediences," and we shall be able to form a general idea of the more serious reasons which made a reform desirable. St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. John Capistran, St. James de la Marcia and St. Catherine of Bolgona were to undertake it in Italy ; St. Colette of Corbie, assisted by Blessed Henry de la Baume, was to carry out the work in Burgundy and in Flanders.\*

\* The account given of the internal history of the Order of Poor Clares is taken partly from the *Histoire Abrégée de l'Ordre de Sainte Claire*, by the monasteries of Lyons and of Tournai ; from the *Histoire de l'Ordre de Saint François*, by J. Fodéré ; and from *Les Frères Mineurs et leurs Dénominations*, by Palomès, Palermo, 1901.

## II.

### CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH OF COLETTE.

COLETTE was born at Corbie, near Amiens, on Sunday, 13th January 1381, her father's name being Robert Boillet (pronounced Boëllet) and her mother's Marguerite Moyon. The saint has often been called "Colette of Burgundy." This arises from the fact that, in the reign of Charles VII. king of France, the towns along the river Somme—Amiens, Corbie, St. Quentin, Abbeville—had been given by the treaty of Arras to the duke of Burgundy.\* However, that was only a passing phase in the history of Corbie, which is always considered a town of Picardy. Founded by the Romans, later on cultivated by the Normans, Corbie was in the sixth century the chief town of an important territory. In the seventh century St. Bathildis, queen of France, founded there a great monastery, which grew imposing and prosperous, whose abbot ruled the petty lords of the neighbourhood as his vassals, and which was quite a little city in itself.

Its outer premises were contained within its enclosure somewhat in the manner of the manifold offices within the walls of a Roman villa ; its buildings were surrounded by gardens ; it owned an extensive library and large

\* Perhaps also because a good deal of her work was accomplished in the Duchy of Burgundy, in Franche Comté or Flanders.



revenues. St. Bernard who visited it, did not admire it. When we read that in 1323 the Lord Abbot held, in the Court of Honour there, a tournament which was attended by all the grandees of the kingdom and the nobles of Picardy, we realise that the Abbey of Corbie was not a religious house according to the saint's ideals. The people of Corbie, proud and courageous, renowned for their valour in battle, for their promptitude in responding to any call to arms, were also much enamoured of independence. In 1123, they had obtained from Louis VI. (" *le Gros* ") their municipal charter, and had made an attempt to govern themselves. But the city fathers were confronted at every turn, with the authority of the Abbot of Corbie ; and whether it was that they tried to rival in brilliancy the rule of the monks who had enriched, fortified, and emancipated the city, or whether they sought to promote its prosperity by imprudent methods, their administration came to grief, and the town, finding itself on the verge of ruin, sold to the king its privileges, which he handed over to the abbey. And so, at the time Colette was born, the abbot of Corbie was the acknowledged ruler of the city, and it was mainly by virtue of his ownerships that it was held by the King.\* The town is pleasantly situated at the junction of the little river Corbe (now known as the Encre) and the Somme. Their peaceful waters meander slowly across the meadows, sometimes hidden beneath the willows, reflecting a sky which is often dull and grey. The country is flat ; somewhat higher in the distant horizon towards Bapaume ; level towards the South and all through the Santerre.

\* See the Abbé Jumel's *Monographie de la ville de Corbie*. Amiens 1904.

In ancient times it had been covered with extensive woods ; these however had been cleared away piecemeal by the monks, who had turned the land to agricultural purposes.

This agriculture was of a very simple kind. In the civic picture-gallery of Amiens, the beautiful fresco of Puvis de Chavannes, *Ave Picardia Nutrix*, depicting the products of this country, shows us only wheat and wine and some drowsy sheep. It is, in fact, the vast and open shady meadows, planted with poplars in groups of five, and fertilised by winding waters and pasturing horses, cows and sheep, which constitute the wealth of the plains of Picardy. These changeless features of the country must have existed in Colette's childhood, with the difference, however, that the town in those days was richer, livelier, more commercial than at the present day. Then, as now, we may be sure, lovely roses persisted in flowering among the ruins. In Picardy, roses, ruins and perpetual battles seem to get on very well together. This much-tried country had seen many armies passing by during the greater part of a century, while fighting in her plains was seldom interrupted. Sometimes it was the march of an ambitious ruler, like the duke of Lancaster ; sometimes an invasion, sometimes the siege of a citadel. When, after 1349, war had been resumed—the States being strongly of opinion that the demands of the Preliminary Treaty of London were “neither endurable nor practicable”—the troops had to carry with them all the food they required, the devastated country being incapable of supplying anything. The “great clash of lances” spoken of by the chronicles of Valois, was heard incessantly in all parts of Picardy.

The hallowed house where Colette was born is still to be seen in Corbie. The street, at that time known as "Rue de la Chaulcie" is now called "de la Chaussée." The house does not front directly on the lane. Like other humble houses near by, it is small and low, surrounded by public paths and little private gardens. There is a well close to the wall just beside the entrance. We know that this well was actually used by Colette. Over its now deeply worn brink the little girl often bent, watching the bucket going down, letting the long chain glide between her hands. Nowadays the opening to the well is closed, and passers-by salute it reverently. That dark mirror which once gave back the reflection of the saintly child is now hidden away.

The principal room, entered directly from the street, is known as the "Room of the Cradle," A remnant of tiling, around the hearth, seems to be the only authentic material vestige of what was the little sitting-room of Colette's parents. Even that is a good deal. And the other tiny room is there, with its ceiling supported by beams, its windows opposite the entrance, and its wicker chimney with the cradle which it seems to shelter. Is it really Colette's cradle? There is no mention of it in the inventory of her relics. But here, at all events, is the setting in which her youth was spent; this is the air which she breathed; these are the surroundings to which she was accustomed, which she loved, and where she made many happy. Her voice was often heard within these walls; here is the threshold which she crossed to see if any poor people were outside. We fall on our knees. Here a saint was born and grew up.

In a life which was to be filled with wonders, her birth,

if not miraculous, presented at least some unusual features. Her mother had been a childless widow of mature age when she married Robert Boillet, and she was sixty years old when Colette was born. This fact has been attested by unimpeachable evidence, including that of citizens of Corbie whose testimony was given at the beatification of the saint. "The people of the town," says one of her oldest historians\* were much surprised to hear that this elderly woman of sixty years had given birth to a child, outside the ordinary course of nature."

The husband and wife saw in this the intervention of God. And remembering that, as we find in the Bible and in the Gospels, a child born late in its parents' life, like St. John the Baptist, is often predestined to great things and endowed with special graces, they feared God in the person of their daughter. As already a consecrated being they treated her with a certain respect, and took great care not to obstruct God's designs in her regard.

Having a special devotion to St. Nicholas, they called the child Nicolette; shortened into Colette.†

The Boillets were well off. The father was a master carpenter. The accounts of Corbie show that he worked for the abbey. He seems to have been a man of some means, and as a craftsman ranked almost as a burgess.

He was above all things a lover of peace. He could not endure to have relatives or neighbours living in discord, and if he heard of any serious family quarrel, he would leave his work aside, until he had succeeded in bringing

\* Cf. *Sylvère d'Abbeville*.

† The saint, in her letters, writes her name with two l's: Collette. We shall use the more usual spelling, which her biographers have adopted.

about a reconciliation. He allowed nothing to interfere, whenever he thought his help was required. He also took a most charitable interest in poor women of evil reputation who wished to amend their lives. This particular work of mercy is one which often gives rise to uncharitable criticism. Some turn away as the Jews did, objecting to such degrading association; others, with evil sneers, impugn the motives of the rescuers. Only those engaged in the work can realise the patience and sympathy it requires. Boillet had bought a house as a refuge for these women, and in return for this generous gift, he required that they in their turn should show hospitality towards any solitary women who asked for shelter when passing through Corbie. The practice of hospitality was, in those ruder times, looked on as a great Christian virtue and a most essential form of benevolence.

Colette was always an exceptional child. When only four years old she understood something of the existence of God. At the age of nine, she knew all about the troubles and disorders in the Church, and also of those existing in the Order of St. Francis. In her later years, Sœur Perrine de la Vaux, Henri de la Balme, and her confessor Pierre de Reims, all heard her assert that her ideas on these subjects were as clear and as enlightened during her childhood as at any subsequent period of her life. Her love for everything relating to God was remarkable. She was an example of that instinctive seeking for God which has characterised so many saints in their childhood. Prayer had always a great attraction for her. For such chosen souls the look heavenward, instead of being an effort, is a necessity as compelling as the desire to run to a mother's arms. As if they stil

remained in closer union than others with the Divine Source of their being, they turn to their heavenly Father for rest and refreshment like a child seeking its food. Many a time did little Colette steal away from her playmates in order to pray. Their childish games could not attract her, and she withdrew herself from them more and more.

She even practised mortifications. The severe St. Jerome was of opinion that mortifications are not to be encouraged in those of immature age ; but Colette was a child ascetic before her twelfth year. She " took food sparingly " (*se nourissait étroitement*) scarcely ever ate meat, slept on a straw mattress into which she put twigs of vine, and always wore " next to her tender skin coarse ropes full of knots."

She was of a tenderly compassionate nature. When she went to school, carrying, as do little girls in every country and in all ages, her luncheon in a basket, she often gave it to poor children whom she chanced to meet. At meals in her home she kept a watch out for beggars, and when ever one came, she made it her special business to attend to his wants. She used to put aside what seemed to her choice portions of the meals for the poor ; she would wait on them and take her meals with them as with beloved friends.

As she grew up her love of solitude increased. Her parents allowed her to arrange a little oratory in the house, and thither she often retreated, thinking and praying alone. She meditated continually on the Passion of Our Lord, being familiar with all its dolorous stages. As they worked side by side, her pious mother would tell her each detail of that wonderful story, and the child never



wearied listening. Whenever she was in her oratory, it was useless for her little friends to come seeking her. "Colette ! Colette !" they used to call outside the house. But she would not come. Sometimes if she thought anyone was coming to look for her, she hid under the bed.

Indeed she never at any time cared for gatherings or reunions, and during all her life disliked appearing in public. She was always "shy and strange in the presence of worldly people, shy and ill at ease in the presence of anyone at all, no matter how well-known or friendly."



Close to her parents' home, only a few hundred yards away, the great Benedictine abbey sheltered its monks, its walls resounding with their daily activities, with the ceaseless murmur of their prayers. The great monastic Church of St. Pierre was the principal one in Corbie, and was open to the public. Here, every night, they assembled for the Nocturnal Hours. For it is only fitting that, even during the silence of the night, the voice of human beings should blend in unison with the ceaseless work of creation. So these Benedictine monks, four or five hundred of them, range themselves in the stately stalls of their church, and the perpetual praise of God, *Laus Perennis*, goes on, like the beads of a rosary, through the twenty-four hours ; the Matins and Lauds, sung before the rising of the sun, linking themselves to the last of the Evening Hours.

In these great psalmodies little Colette loved to join. There it was that she learned to love the Divine Office—the office recited by priests, and which she continued to recite all her life. During the night she arose, went through the silent streets, and into the church. Her

parents, good, simple people, saw no reason to object to this. But their neighbours thought otherwise. "Is it possible," said they, "that you allow this delicate child to go out during the night and deprive herself of sleep? Her health will never stand it." At which her parents, taking alarm, made Colette sleep in the upper storey of their house.

But the little girl had already special friends of her own. One was an old man, Adam Mannier, who lived next door. Understanding Colette's distress and believing that she was no ordinary child, he used to help her through the window each night, and allow her to go down through his own house, whence she made her way to the church.

Robert Boillet heard of this, but acted as if he knew nothing about it. Colette would have been at the time eleven or twelve years old.

At the age of fourteen it seemed as if her growth had stopped. She was then very small—almost a dwarf, thinks Sylvère d'Abbeville. Her parents were much distressed. It was a humiliation to them to have their child so conspicuously small; and besides, the mother was old, and would have liked the child to be strong so that she could take up the work of the house. One day Colette heard her father say to some of his neighbours that "he was very sorry to be the father of so stunted a child." She was greatly distressed and decided to ask God as a favour to make her grow.

With this object she went on a pilgrimage to some shrine near Corbie, most probably to Notre Dame de Brebières,\* which was a sanctuary of great renown in

\* The strongest evidence in favour of this church having been that to which Colette made this pilgrimage, is furnished by a reliquary of

that region. Many miracles had taken place there, and great crowds assembled on certain days. The chapel of Notre Dame de Brebières was very old even in Colette's time, and was built in the fields about half a league from Albert, which at that time was still called Encre, from the name of the river flowing through it and through Corbie.

The statue venerated in this sanctuary had been found buried in the ground at this spot by an old shepherd who was grazing his flocks on this great bare pasture land of Brebières.\*

Along the banks of the Corbie, therefore, Colette must have travelled, going first to Encre, then to Brebières. We can picture her, frail and tiny, making her way through the morning mists with which these plains are so often covered. No doubt she was upheld and sustained by the extraordinary confidence in God which had inspired her to make this effort. The journey would have been about four leagues. Arrived at the church, she fell on her knees, and with childlike simplicity asked over and the fifteenth century belonging to the ancient treasury of Brebières, and which has on one side the little Colette kneeling before the altar. The name of Colette is engraved below the figure. (Yves Sainte-Marie. *Notre Dame de Brebières*.)

\* For a long time this sanctuary remained standing in the fields, but was pulled down during the reign of Louis XV. The statue, very ancient, but by no means unpleasing or unskilfully carved, of Our Lady holding the Child, while a sheep plays at His feet, was brought into the town. Shortly before this, Encre had received its new name of Albert, after the Marquis of Albert, Duke of Luynes, to whom Louis XIV. had presented it. We must reverence this locality, where a great miracle was worked in St. Colette's favour. Both the town and the great new church which sheltered the statue were utterly destroyed during the Great War.

over again, " Alas, O Lord, do you wish me always to remain so small ? "

Then she explained her request.

" Lord God, if it is for your glory and for my salvation that I must always be of small stature, I am quite satisfied ; much preferring that you should make me tall in Paradise, than that I should be tall in this world, and that my body should be the occasion of offending you. But should it, however, please you, having safeguarded these two matters, to give this pleasure to my father and to make this little body of mine grow, may your will be accomplished in me and on me ! "

She stood up, and immediately " she saw that she had grown, and she was taller when returning than she had been when coming."

Her parents at once noticed it, and so did the people of Corbie who knew her, and this marvel made a great sensation. We get this story directly from herself, and biographers invariably report it in these same terms. We do not, of course, know what exactly took place ; but we do know that a rapid growth began which quite transformed her in a few months or perhaps weeks ; that on a certain day she grew on a sudden and very noticeably, and that very soon her height was above that of an average woman.

Her height is sufficiently proved by measuring her garments. Among the relics of the saint is her mantle, in the monastery of Poor Clares at Ghent, while her robe is preserved at Poligny. From these two tangible pieces of evidence, having taken into account the rules concerning their length and distance from the ground, we find that Colette must have been about five feet six inches in height (1 m. 70).

Colette was a beautiful girl. She was gifted with an attractive appearance, a dignified carriage, an unusual grace of form "*une non commune bonne grace*." "God, having bestowed on her an abundance of interior graces and virtues, was also pleased to endow her with exterior graces, such as bodily beauty, graciousness and amiability. Both in face and figure she was very beautiful and pleasing, notwithstanding that during all her life she judged and believed herself to be a very ugly creature, both within and without. Her complexion was fair and rosy, of heavenly rather than earthly appearance, and more like an angel than a human being; and so composed and orderly was her bearing that one could see in it no trace of frivolity or vanity." \*

But Colette, grown tall and attractive, had to face the danger which she had pleaded with the Almighty at all costs to avert. "Preferring to remain small all my life," she had said, "rather than that my body should be the cause of offending you." For a long time she did not realise how beautiful she was, until the words of a young fellow-townsmen made her aware of it. Whereupon she immediately sought her Heavenly Father, who had shown Himself so ready to listen to her prayers. It almost seemed as if this Divine Father had failed to keep their contract, and she begged of Him earnestly that He would take away the brilliant complexion which drew upon her such unwelcome attention. Her prayer was heard. Immediately this "*vermeilleté*" disappeared, and, says Sœur Perrine, "her face, hands, and body became of a dull white colour, and remained thus all her life, as was seen by many during her lifetime."

\* Pierre de Reims.

Her physical development, however, was only an outward sign of the rapid mental and spiritual growth which was taking place at the same time. When this child of fourteen so suddenly sprang up to the height of a full-grown woman, her mind expanded at the same time to an extraordinary degree, manifesting a keen and lucid intellect which might almost be described as genius. Later on, we shall see her successfully undertaking all sorts of tasks, full of intelligence and of good sense, forceful and clever; competent and resourceful when meeting strangers; and well versed in various branches of knowledge—that of languages, for example: she understood Italian, German, and a good deal of Latin. Well may we ask ourselves how and when this untutored girl acquired her knowledge and experience. And she possessed another unusual talent—that of eloquence.

Her friends loved to gather round and hear her speak of God. With God she was on terms of intimate union; she had already reached that high degree of prayer spoken of by St. Teresa, where the soul lives in constant and effortless familiarity with divine things, and all that her prayerful childhood had taught her, all the heavenly light gained in her long meditations and early revelations, all the strength acquired in those hours of fervour—this was placed at the service of her friends. Like the owner of a fine orchard who assembles her friends and offers them her basket full of beautiful fruit, saying "Take what you will," so did Colette share with her friends, young and old, the secret treasures of her soul. From that time forward, certain of those devoted friends, whom we shall see following her with unwearying affection all her life, were her disciples. They were about the same age as



herself, fifteen or sixteen years old, while their mothers or other younger women came to join the pious little group and to listen with delight to Colette's instructions. What did she teach? "The love of God and an upright life:" "*l'Amour de Dieu et la vie droite.*" She is always clear and concise in her words; and this formula of hers makes us think of the replies of Joan of Arc. All during her life, and wherever she went, she "begged of men to love God." This expression recurs continually in all the accounts which we have of her. Many woman were attracted to a holier life through her influence; many became nuns.

Soon her audiences became larger and larger. With a striking facility of thought and expression, she lectured on the mysteries of religion and the Commandments; then, addressing herself more directly to the consciences and hearts of her listeners, she spoke of sin, of the horror of the offences committed by mankind, of the Passion of Christ—that source of mercy and of contrition ever open to Christians. Her discourses were fresh, sensible, yet full of ardour and appeal. Many of her listeners wept. She had already had several visions of the Passion of Our Lord, so that when speaking of this Sorrowful Mystery, she seemed to describe it with the realism of an eyewitness.

In her home she led an austere and hidden life, doing household work, taking care of the poor, visiting the Magdalens rescued by her father. But her zeal for souls drew her from time to time to resume her discourses, which were attended by ever-increasing crowds.

Thereupon difficulties arose. Colette was then very young, for this apostolate took place between her fifteenth

and seventeenth years ; besides, she was uneducated. How, then, could she teach others ? The clergy were by no means pleased with this impromptu missionary, and on the plea both of her youth and her lack of instruction they denounced her to the bishop.\* “ We admit that this young girl is pious,” said the complainants, “ but piety does not impart knowledge ; and besides, she causes our churches to be deserted, as people flock to her meetings.”

The Bishop of Amiens sent for one of the priests of Corbie in whom he had great confidence ; asked him to find out what was happening, to make some discreet inquiries, and to let him know the result. This envoy, as it so happened, was the curé of Notre Dame, the parish church of the Rue de la Chaulcie, and was also Colette’s confessor. Without letting anyone know of his purpose, he went to the place where the little gathering used to assemble periodically, and there, having arrived after the service had already commenced, he listened, without making himself known, to all that went on, and tried conscientiously to separate the good from the evil. Everything was quiet and peaceful ; there was no disturbance, no ostentation. Grave and humble, with a seriousness unusual in youth, fully confident that she was accomplishing God’s will, Colette spoke to these women with serene dignity, and, whenever Our Saviour was mentioned, with an emotion which deeply impressed her new listener.

So, when Colette had finished, he stood up and, speaking so that all could hear him, he encouraged her to continue this apostolate, no matter what was done to prevent

\* MS. of the Abbé de Saint-Laurent, and Sellier, *Vie de Sainte Colette*.

it, assuring her that as far as he was concerned, she could count on his support.

To the bishop he sent a report praising not alone the learning of this young girl, but also her prudence and wisdom. He added that, if those members of the clergy who had denounced her were themselves more zealous, they might be less inclined to be jealous of her.

But all this was taking place in a small town, in a narrow environment. The murmurings went on. Colette was called a visionary, unstable, abnormal. The noble families of the neighbourhood all prevented their daughters from going near her.

Colette must, of course, have suffered a good deal. Her youthful courage had quickly brought her up against serious difficulties. Nevertheless she persevered, confident that she was doing nothing wrong; never weary of speaking of God to her appreciative audiences, heedless of malicious comments. But the inevitable happened. The Bishop of Amiens, tired of this incessant opposition, sent for Colette, and regretfully advised her to cease her discourses for a while. Colette, who had suffered much annoyance during the year previous, made no difficulty about accepting this advice, and thenceforth was silent.



When Colette was seventeen years old, her father's life was visibly drawing to a close. Her mother was already dead, so she would soon be alone in the world. Old Boillet, feeling that his end was approaching, went to the great monastery of Corbie to see the abbot, Dom Raoul de Roye, and to his care he confided his child. There was some property which she would inherit, and he requested that the abbot would administer it, and look

after the orphan girl. Boillet was the master carpenter of the Abbey ; where he had worked honestly and capably all his life ; so the abbot, great personage as he was, accepted the guardianship of this faithful servitor's daughter.

After her father's death, there ensued for Colette a period of great uncertainty. While ardently wishing to devote herself to the service of God, she did not know how best to set about it. And nowhere could she find any help.

One thing at least she could do, and that was—to become poor. And so her first act, when she got possession of her property, was to get rid of it. “ She sold her inheritance and gave away her money in charity.” It all went to the poor, thus affording her very great joy, for her tender heart loved to assist the unfortunate : besides, there was the further joy of renunciation ! The heritage she received from her father and mother was, say her biographers, “ reasonably good and plentiful.” She distributed it all, thus depriving herself of every source of future income and of those cumbrances which men call the “ necessities of life.” Such was Colette—beautiful, improvident, a true daughter of St. Francis the Wanderer.

This, then, was her reply to the proposition of Dom Raoul, who, genuinely interested in her future, had been looking out for a husband for her among the young men of Corbie.

Colette resolutely refused to marry ; in fact, the idea of marriage was utterly repugnant to her. Throughout her life she manifested an intense love for the virtue of purity, and, while recognising that the Evangelical Counsels are for the few rather than the many, she felt

that, as far as she herself was concerned, nothing short of perpetual chastity would content her. As a child she had, in fact, somewhat exaggerated ideas on the subject, and with youthful zeal had reproached her mother for having married twice.

And later on, her devotion to St. Anne, the mother of Our Lady, was not a little disturbed at the thought of the three marriages ascribed to the saint by tradition. Whereupon St. Anne condescended to appear to her in a vision, showing how gloriously she was justified in her descendants. "Madame St. Anne appeared to her very gloriously leading with her her noble family, that is to say, her three daughters and their glorious children. Of which daughters the first was the most excellent and holy Virgin Mary, queen of heaven and earth, sovereign lady of angels and of all creatures, holding by the hand her dearly-beloved son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, our most precious Redeemer and glorious Saviour. The second was Mary of James, holding by the hands her four glorious children, that is to say, St. James the Less, St. Simon, St. Jude, and Joseph the Just. The third was Mary Salome, holding by the hands her two glorious children, St. James the Greater, and St. John the Evangelist. And by this apparition the glorious Madame St. Anne manifested to her that, notwithstanding that she had been several times married, nevertheless the whole Church Militant and Church Triumphant had been greatly honoured and adorned by her most noble descendants."\*

Colette, now without relatives or possessions, set out for Amiens, where she lived for several months, having been attracted by the renown of a monk who had come

\* Perrine de Vaux. MS. quoted.

there to found a monastery of Celestines. He was now prior of the monastery and his name was Jean Bassan. His Order had acquired great lustre through its founder, the holy Pope Celestine V. To help the Church at a very troubled time, in the year 1294, the hermit, Pietro di Morone, had been forced from his humble and hidden life, and placed on the pontifical throne as Celestine V. To him this had been a veritable agony, and after a few months he had laid down his heavy burthen. His successor, Boniface VIII., fearing popular movements for his restoration, kept him in a strict seclusion, from which in the following year death released him. His followers, called Celestines, were fervent and austere religious men.

How did Colette live at Amiens? How, in fact, had she lived since distributing her possessions to the poor? Her biographers do not give us any details, and we can only conjecture that she must have supported herself by the work of her hands. At a later period, when in her hermitage, she used to do needlework; so that it is quite probable that she maintained herself by sewing. It would be in keeping with her humility and with the precepts of St. Francis.

She had not been mistaken in looking to Père Bassan for help. An edifying and holy priest, he had attained some eminence in his Order, and to Colette he was a veritable tower of strength. He must have been comparatively young, for we find that his death did not take place till forty years later. Colette gave him her entire confidence, showing him clearly the state of her soul, somewhat troubled by the attacks and contradictions which she had encountered at Corbie and, more seriously, by her uncertainty as to how she ought to spend her life.



It should be remembered also that spirituality, or what is usually spoken of as "prayer" is in reality a science in itself. St. Teresa has told us, in vivid and arresting words, of its various stages. To understand it properly, prudent and enlightened guidance is essential. In the most ordinary matters a sane and enlightened judgment is often difficult to arrive at; why should it be easy in spiritual matters? Up to this time, Colette had had no guide except her instinct and her rectitude; one might say that she had walked with her eyes shut in supernatural regions, laden with unimaginable favours. Now, Père Bassan was an expert in the science of the saints. He knew from personal experience the difficult path along which Colette was travelling; his soul had been elevated and his spiritual outlook enlarged by heavenly favours. He was not destined to rise to the heights attained by Colette, but he was a safe guide for, at least, her early steps. Besides all this, he consoled and strengthened her. One likes to think that he was very fatherly and kind to this girl, so young, so solitary, impoverished by her own heroic self-denial, and persecuted because she had the fearlessness of a true apostle. As he had travelled a good deal, it is not improbable that he was one of the first to tell her of the changes which were taking place in the Franciscan Order and the difficulties connected with them; and especially of the reform which had been undertaken in Italy.

But, though he did all this for her, Père Bassan told her that he could not discern with any clearness the best way for her to spend her life. He felt quite certain that she was not meant for the world, yet could not decide what particular kind of religious life would suit her best.

Nevertheless, he suggested to her, and even advised her, to make a vow of perpetual chastity. This suggestion was received by Colette with great delight, and after some days of preparation, she pronounced before Père Bassan the vow by which she consecrated herself to the service and love of God alone. There is no higher gift than one's self ; no more sublime moment in life than that of dedication to some exalted service. On that day Colette thus dedicated herself. Those mystic espousals changed the whole outlook of her life.

She returned to Corbie. In the town there was a "*béguinage*," that is to say, a kind of convent where pious women who did not wish to take religious vows lived together, spending their time in prayer and good works. Colette joined these Béguines in order to take part in looking after the sick in the hospital. But the life of the Béguines, pious and edifying, but not austere, did not satisfy the craving for higher things with which Colette was consumed. She left them. Père Bassan had found great difficulty in keeping her corporal penances within bounds, her love for ascetic practices being as great as ever. She next made inquiries about the nuns of St. Francis, the Poor Clares, and finding that they had a convent at Pont-Sainte-Maxence, between Compiègne and Senlis, she went there and sought admission as a servant.

As a servant ; to become a nun would have seemed to her too high an honour. Her sole ambition was to serve. These Poor Clares, however, were "Urbanists," that is to say, they followed the relaxed rule sanctioned by Pope Urban IV., showing no desire whatever for the "*Privilegium Paupertatis*." Colette could see with her own eyes

how far the Poor Clares living under that rule had departed from that observed by the glorious companions of St. Clare, how the radiance of the saintly pioneers of St. Damian's had become dimmed and confused in the course of time. While doing her household tasks, humble and unknown, "reputed vile," according to her desire, she was suffering. She was asking herself if these were indeed the mendicants whom St. Francis wished to send along the road, examples of poverty and of silence. Feeling strongly that not amongst them was her abiding place, she left them.

Her third attempt was in a convent of Benedictines. As elsewhere, they showed the greatest esteem for the willing and helpful lay-sister, and would have liked to keep her. But from them also she departed ; and once again she returned to Corbie.

What purpose, one may wonder, had been served by these three years, with these various new attempts, and various worries and troubles ? She was now twenty-one years old. The remarkable promise shown in earlier years had not borne fruit. She had failed to take root or establish herself anywhere. Since her fourteenth year, when she had shown herself already so mature of mind, so richly endowed, overflowing with eloquence and piety, everything she put her hand to had gone wrong. Seven long years ! No wonder that those who knew her, seeing her returning unsatisfied time after time, decided that she must be changeable and inconstant. It seemed as if all the unkind criticism she had received in Corbie in former times was now fully justified. No one could understand her. People kept away from her. Just a few of her friends, we know, remained faithful ; and Dom Raoul, who had

taken her under his care, continued to afford her protection.

As to what her own thoughts or feelings were, we know nothing. We have no evidence concerning this somewhat obscure period in her life. Was she sad and discouraged? Or did she remain cheerful and courageous? We have no means of guessing. When talking to her nuns later on, she never said very much about that time; as if her real life had then scarcely begun, and that those days of doubt and uncertainty were no more than a dim and troubled prelude to her real existence.

Only one anecdote of this period has come down to us, the story of "the young man in the church." Colette was at prayer in one of the churches of Corbie when a young man, passing by, came in and saw her. Of disreputable character, he considered this quiet place afforded a good opportunity of making the acquaintance of this beautiful girl, and approaching, he addressed her with many compliments, suggesting that they should meet outside. Colette, taken by surprise, distressed at the insult offered to God in His own house, and keenly resenting the insult to her vow of chastity, turned towards the young man, saying that she hoped God would help him to understand the evil of his conduct; whereupon, ashamed of having given offence, he quickly left her. Perhaps he realised, as Colette's biographer says, that she was "set apart as the spouse and friend of God:" at all events, he understood that he must not trouble her further. But when he wished to pass out through the great door of the church, which stood wide open, he found it impossible to do so. He went up to it, but could not go through; then he turned back and, quite bewildered,

tried again to go out, but struck against some obstacle, invisible and unsurmountable. Perplexed and alarmed, wondering what could possibly be the matter, he suddenly realised that he ought to ask Colette to pardon him. So he returned to her, and "very humbly besought her forgiveness." To which she, also with great humility, replied that God in His mercy had forgiven him. After which, without any further difficulty, he crossed the threshold and went out.

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It would seem as if Colette, at this turning point of her life found herself somewhat at a loss. Not that she had done anything wrong. She saw clearly before her one ultimate aim—the service of God; but could not discover the road along which she was to travel. Men have a certain sense of vocation or destiny, as instinctive as that of self-preservation, and are never really satisfied unless they can find their proper place in this world. So far, Colette could not feel any assurance that she was on the right path. She had tried every opening within her reach, but so far had not found peace.

One day a Franciscan friar passed through the town. He was "Guardian" of the convent of Hesdin, in Artois, and it was his duty to visit the various convents of the province. Colette, for whom the habit of St. Francis always had an attraction, sought him out, and told him the whole story of her troubles, her various unsuccessful attempts, her quest, so far without result, for a truly religious life. This friar, Jehan Pinet, who played so decisive a part in Colette's destiny, listened with sympathy and understanding. Convinced that he had been sent by God to direct her, she begged so insistently that

he would take an interest in her and help her to decide her destiny—promising that she would accept unquestioningly his decision—that the friar, struck with the beauty of this soul and its painful state of doubt and uncertainty, consented to think over the matter and express a definite opinion on it.

Some weeks later he returned to Corbie. And his suggestion was that Colette should join the third Order of St. Francis and then become a recluse.

Perpetual solitude ; this was the courageous reply which the friar made to Colette's anxious questionings. A life entirely alone, a life of imprisonment ; deprived of all that makes existence tolerable, cut off completely from the world around her—this was the proposal which he put before her, saying, " Will you accept ? "

Colette needed no time for reflection. Joy seldom deceives ; and her soul overflowed with joy. Perhaps she had already dreamed of the life of a recluse, but had not dared to venture on it ; but this direction which she had begged for, waited for, which seemed to have come straight from Heaven, pointed it out to her, a veritable pathway to happiness. Away from the world, its vanities, its lies, its troubles and anxieties ; in a word, as she herself wrote afterwards, " always alone with God alone." To live unknown and hidden, with four walls bounding her horizon, to hold no communication with the world outside, to see nothing of the wonders of the universe ; to walk no farther than her tiny room allowed ; and, finally, to be entirely dependent on charity. To have no resources except the goodwill of one's neighbour , or the chance that a passer-by may wish to bestow an alms ; to wait for a meal until someone remembers the recluse.



To be in bondage, a captive, even in sickness, even in death. And still, how immeasurably free ! Because the soul, in voluntary servitude and complete detachment, is far more courageous. Because the soul, once released from material cares, can abandon itself to the rapture of Divine love. Because it is only when cut off from men that the soul really begins to know God. To become from day to day more isolated and more remote ; to remain a fixed point in a world of movement ; and, instead of speaking, to listen. Then a voice rings out, which takes from sorrow its bitterness, from death its sting. And day by day a flood of divine wisdom, strength and sweetness will refresh this soul—as firmly rooted as a flower in the closely-packed soil. Colette, filled with a longing desire for these great favours, thought little of the sacrifices which would be their price, of the constraints and austerities of such a mode of life. She looked forward to the day when she would shut herself up in solitude as to a day of benediction. Some time, however, was to pass before her desire was granted. She was still under the guardianship of the Abbot of Corbie, and when she told him of her intention, he refused his consent.

From wise and prudent motives, no doubt, for he had under his own jurisdiction some monks who were recluses. The archives of this abbey and of many other Benedictine monasteries, enumerate at this time a certain number of clerics or professed religious : of novices, of lay brethren, and of recluses. These latter lived in small, separate dwellings, and formed a sort of little Charterhouse adjoining the monastery, with the difference that ordinary Carthusians can walk about and go outside, while these recluses never left their narrow hermitage, cell, and

garden, and held no communication with each other, except, perhaps, for the recitation of the Office which in some monasteries was said in common. Where this was done, the huts were joined together, with the little gardens in front, and a wicket opening from one oratory into the other along the whole length of the row of cells.

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The form of religious life, indicated above, which flourished exceedingly in the Middle Ages, is derived from the most ancient traditions of the Church. It was an austere variant of the monastic life. What it means is an absolute and perpetual enclosure in a very small dwelling. The recluse was completely alone and shut in for the rest of his life. It might be imagined that such a mode of life was altogether exceptional. On the contrary, these recluses were very numerous, and of all sorts and conditions; men and women, monks, priests, noblemen and tradesmen, rich and poor, were all to be found among those who adopted this life. At certain times they became so numerous that the Church made special rules for them, and had them under consideration at various Councils, and in a special way at that held at Frankfort-on-Maine in 794, where the Bishops of Gaul, Germany, and Aquitania were assembled. According to Dom Piolin, the earliest episcopal legislation concerning them of which anything is known, was made at a provincial council held at Vannes in 465. Their life, which would seem to require a patience and a taste for asceticism exceeding ordinary human strength, was far more solitary than that of the hermits, who could go about wherever they pleased; they dwelt in the desert but were otherwise free. His four walls were the limit of the recluse's whole horizon.

Sometimes he has a little garden, sometimes he has to content himself with his cell for the rest of his life. He is like a tree, irrevocably rooted in one spot. He has nothing to look forward to except heaven. In the various methods by which men have sought to detach themselves from the world, for the practice of prayer and self-denial, the highest degree seems to have been attained by the recluse.

Yet this kind of asceticism was known before Christianity. There were recluses among Persians and Hindoos. It was afterwards adopted by the teachers of Christianity like many other instinctively religious practices which they transformed and made their own. The first Christian recluse was the great St. Anthony the Hermit, one of the Fathers of the Desert, born in 251 in Upper Egypt. At the age of twenty-one he distributed all his goods to the poor and at first shut himself up at the door of his own house. Afterwards he went to the desert, and got one of his disciples to build him into a great deserted cave—an empty sepulchre. Once a week bread and water were handed in to the hermit, through a narrow opening in the tomb. But a great number of curious visitors were attracted there by his reputation of sanctity, and to escape them he went across the desert, beyond the eastern branch of the Nile, until he came to the Arabian chain of mountains, between Atfih and Beni-Souef, a frightful desert, where he took up his abode in the ruins of a castle close to a stream.\* His food was thrown to him across the walls by his disciples.† There he spent seventeen

\* Quoted by M. L. Duchesne, from the *Géographie de l'Égypte*, d'Amelineau, and the *Anecdotes Oxon Semitis Series*.

† L. Bulteau, of the Congregation of St. Maur, *Essai de l'Histoire Monastique d'Orient*. Paris: Louis Billain. 1680.

years, subsequently adopting a life of activity and founding monasteries.

Another pioneer recluse was a woman, St. Syncletica, also an Egyptian, who lived shut up in a tomb like St. Anthony, until her death at the age of eighty-five. From that time onward, historical accounts of these recluses continue in uninterrupted succession. The work entitled *Vie des Pères du Desert* gives the names of a number of voluntary recluses ; and subsequently this mode of life became known in the West. In the Middle Ages there were considerable numbers of these recluses, of whom many were celebrated saints, as, for instance, St. Bavon of Ghent, a recluse in the forest of Malmedun during the seventh century ; St. Hiltrude of Hainault ; St. Ida of Saxony. They were to be found in all the countries of Europe ; at Rome, in England, in Ireland, in Switzerland. St. Gregory of Tours, in writing the history of the Franks, speaks of several recluses living in France, with whom he personally came into contact, especially Hospitius, who lived near the Abbey of Noirmontiers. St. Cybard of Poitiers, St. Eucharis of Lyons, St. Aignan, all recluses, were contemporaries of St. Gregory. In Paris there were ten permanent "recluseries," where a new recluse immediately took the place of one who died ; and others existed in Brittany, Normandy, Languedoc, Lorraine, and in the valley of the Rhone.

They were to be found in various situations ; sometimes within monasteries or against churches, sometimes at the entrance to a town, sometimes near a bridge or on the bridge itself ; the main idea being that it should be a place where passers-by were numerous, so that the alms on which the recluses lived could be easily collected.

Even at the present day we sometimes see, at the transept of some Gothic church, the bondstone showing where a recluse's cell was formerly attached.

Those recluses who belonged to a monastery had their material needs supplied from it ; but even those not thus attached were seldom left to the chance generosity of passers-by. Frequently they were adopted by the towns where they lived, and became municipal property. The town supported the penitent it thus owned, by means of a small pension and an annual gift of clothing.\* This mode of life was often very severe, very wretched. Nevertheless the descriptions we have of it do not suggest that it was so utterly barbarous as some writers would have us believe. Besides, the first essential of this life was that it should be voluntary, and if it had been so unbearable, there would not have been so many recruits.

The Church, when making regulations for them, concerned itself principally in making their lives less rigorous, and in protecting them against a mistaken vocation by exacting a year or two of probation. It also took measures to safeguard its own good name against intriguers and "spongers" by making it necessary for the recluses to be able to read the Office and to meditate ; and also by surrounding their entry into seclusion with great solemnities, putting these penitents almost on a level with professed religious. There is still extant a ritual which prescribes a special and very imposing ceremonial for the admission of a recluse, and gives the order of the procession which conducted him from the church to his cell.

\* See Marcellin Boudet, *La Recluserie du Pont Sainte Christine à Saint Flour*, a very curious and interesting study of the life of those recluses.

Until the sixteenth century recluses remained fairly numerous ; but on account of the wars about religious questions, they became more and more rare ; few being still in existence in the seventeenth century. We find mention of hermit monks of the Order of Camaldoli at Monte Corona in 1837 ; of Spaniards in the Sierra Morena in 1869. These, however, are merely the last traces of the original "reclusage." But during Colette's childhood, the recluses, men and women were well known everywhere. Among the letters of Gerson, which were written about this time, several were addressed to recluses, exhorting them to observe discipline, or putting them on their guard against the false visions which sometimes assailed these solitaries.

Dom Raoul de Roye, therefore, understood thoroughly the hardships of the existence which Colette wished to embrace ; and he hoped that time and reflection would make her change her mind. This life demanded such endurance, physical and moral, that anyone, even a monk, who had been entrusted with the care of a young girl by her father, might well hesitate before permitting her to adopt it. But Colette remained immoveable, neither delays nor objections shaking her resolution in the least. She appealed several times to Dom Raoul without success ; at last one day she threw herself at his feet, imploring of him to give his consent. At this he felt he could no longer refuse her ; and from that time onward he assisted her in every way to carry out her wishes. He made a collection among charitably disposed people in Corbie, and one woman, Guillemotte Gamalin, widow of the Provost Seneschal, gave the money necessary to construct the little hermitage. It was built at a spot chosen by Colette,



between the two buttresses of the Church of Notre Dame, beside the square. It was "a narrow and poor habitation," says the chronicler, but the Abbot took a good deal of trouble about it, and made it as comfortable as he could ; "*tant consolatif qu'il put.*"

The plan of the dwelling was as follows :—From the outside, one step led into a little extern parlour, at one end of which was a door with a wicket. The door was always closed, but the wicket could be opened, so that the recluse could be seen when one wished to speak to her, or objects could be passed in or out when necessary.\* This door was that of her room, small and bare, beyond which was her oratory. From it Colette was able to see the interior of the church, through another wicket, so that it might almost be said that she lived in the church itself. The opening into her oratory was situated between the altar and the communion table, under one of the stained glass windows of the choir. These windows came down rather low, which suggests that the oratory was only one storey high. It is, in fact, improbable that any higher construction would have been permitted, as it would have had the effect of blocking up one of these main windows ; while it would be quite reasonable that this wicket, through which the recluse could see into the church and could receive Holy Communion should be placed at about the height of a man. Some have, nevertheless, maintained that there was a second storey, and

\* In this way Colette was given food, water for washing, the materials for her needlework, and so on. Sometimes these hermitages had a little chimney. From the point of view of hygiene and comfort, the ordinary houses of that time were very little better off than these hermitages.

have even drawn up plans of the hermitage, in which we see a little staircase like a miller's ladder. But as we are not told on what evidence these plans are founded, it seems better to adopt the more reasonable solution ; and taking as a guide a certain projecting stone which is still to be seen in the apse of the little old church of Corbie, we can reconstruct the plan of the little hermitage. It was like a shed leaning against the church, with a little door opening on the public square. The irregular shape of the building could easily provide for the three tiny rooms which we know Colette had at her disposal ; the little entrance hall, where three or four people could stand together, her own room, the small proportions of which were revealed to the people of Corbie on the day that Henri de la Baume arrived there ; and thirdly her oratory, which was to be the scene of so many visions, revelations, apparitions, and ecstasies.

It was usual for some charitable person to undertake to supply the wants of the recluse. Colette had two very dear friends, who assumed this responsibility ; they were the companions of her childhood, Guillemette Chrestien \* and Jacquette la Grande.

The formal permission to build the cell is dated 10th September, 1402.

Colette went there that same month. It was an imposing ceremony, a "solemn mystery." The enclosure of a penitent had to be done publicly with certain rites and formalities. At least two rituals, those of the Church of Soissons, and of St. Paul of Lyons, have preserved for us the prescribed ceremonial. The choice of a Sunday was

\* Guillemette Chrestien later on became a Poor Clare and Abbess of Hesdin.

almost a matter of obligation. Colette, therefore, most probably began her enclosure on that day. The recluse, whether man or woman, was clothed in a special dress, comprising a habit, cloak, and hood : the authorities of the neighbourhood, ecclesiastical and civil, went in procession to seek him in his house, and conducted him to the church, where a special service took place, somewhat resembling that of a religious reception or taking of the veil. It also included a form of interrogatory so that the recluse had to declare aloud and in public his explicit wish to live in solitude.

It was the friar, Jehan Pinet, the Guardian of Hesdin, her beloved spiritual father, who received Colette Boillet's vow of " perpetual and absolute enclosure." Dom Raoul presided at the ceremony, with all the impressive dignity associated with the Benedictine Order, and doubtless with most beautiful singing, for the Gregorian music was just then in full splendour. The long procession, in which the monks of the Abbey took part, escorted Colette to the door of the hermitage. As a rule, the penitent was given the key of his dwelling, so that he opened it for himself, thus symbolising his free choice in the matter. Our saint was, say the chroniclers, very poorly dressed. Under her mantle she wore the habit of the Third Order.

Arrived in front of the hermitage, and about to enclose herself within, she advanced with a firm step, and with every appearance of joy and respect she knelt down on the threshold and kissed it. Then she went in. The people pressed around. All felt the solemnity of the moment. For a few moments longer the onlookers caught a glimpse of a radiant countenance, all candour and simplicity ; then the door was shut.

According to the regulations and according to all human anticipation Colette would never leave her prison alive. The closed door was sealed, on the frame, with a large wax seal, on which Dom Raoul impressed his own Abbot's seal. During the following days, a workman built up the boards with mortar.



HER new life had begun ; a life cut off from human companionship, but intimately united with God ; a life which was to last for four years and to make this pious young girl a great saint.

In order to find God, she chose from the beginning " the royal road of corporal penance." Now, more than ever, did she nourish herself sparingly, (*étroitement*, says her chronicler.) Her friends who, towards the evening of each day, carried to her a simple meal, were frightened at the small amount of food which she took ; some vegetables, water, a little bread, sometimes a small cake baked in the ashes. And on certain days even this frugal repast remained untouched. She took very little sleep. For a bed she had some straw, arranged between two wooden logs, with a block of wood for a pillow. For some time previous to this she had accustomed herself to doing without underlinen, and wore her tertiary's habit next her skin. She wore neither stockings nor shoes. From this time forward, for the rest of her life, this was her invariable practice. " Neither shoes, nor slippers, nor sandals " her biographer states explicitly.\* At night, when sleeping, she lay on the straw, covering herself with what was then known as a " blanchet," or small coverlet.

\* We are speaking here of Sylvère d'Abbeville.

To this harsh and abstemious mode of existence (" *sobre et aspre* ") she added certain specified penances ; she wore a " rough and barbarous haircloth ; " she girded " her frail and tender body with three cruel chains of iron, which painfully sank into and wounded her innocent flesh." Seven times a day she disciplined herself with knotted cords.

Her time was fully occupied. She recited daily the Divine Office, the same as that of the Benedictine monks, to which in her childhood, she had listened with such delight, and which they still chanted only a short distance away. To this office, the reading of which even in a whisper takes several hours, she added on certain days Office for the Dead : by means of her wicket opening into the sanctuary, she was enabled to take part in all the services ; there she assisted at all the Masses ; and there also she prayed for long hours during the night, sole worshipper in the dark and silent church.

She was never idle. Any spare time she had was occupied in the sewing and mending of clothes for the poor or of altar linen. She was an excellent needle-woman, and it is a curious and interesting fact that we can judge of this for ourselves ; for her mantle, carefully preserved at Ghent, is adorned down both sides of the front with darning, coarse and fine, which is the work of her hands.

Besides, she was continually being asked to come to her wicket to listen to the confidences of those who sought for help. Any who had once learned to know Colette found her advice so indispensable that they were constantly coming to ask for it. Foremost among these were the friends of her childhood, led by Guillemette Chrestien

and Jacquette la Grande, Marie Sénéchal and her mother; then, others whom these faithful friends brought to her; and later on, many priests. All, when leaving her felt comforted and strengthened.

They also invariably spoke of her look of ever-increasing happiness. To those who asked how the young girl was enduring her austere existence this was the only reply they could make: and, as time went on, the radiant brightness of her countenance increased, so that she seemed, as it were, lost in heavenly delights.

What are we to say of the sublime heights to which she soared on the wings of prayer? Can we hope to follow her, as she rose higher and higher in those rapturous flights? For us who are still impeded by our bodies—" *nous autre charnels*," as Charles Péguy expresses it, these are mysteries. Ever contemplating God, ever in communication with the supreme Origin of light and beauty, finding in supernatural grace a perpetual source of mystical life Colette lived in a state which seems to have bordered on perpetual ecstasy.

She devoted much time to contemplation of the Passion of Our Saviour. Here she comes more within our reach; for human love itself enlightens us as to the desire that love feels to recall the doings of those dear to us and thus to increase our love. Even as a child, her pity and sympathy had been awakened by her mother's simple stories of all that Christ had endured for us; later on, while still young, a vision of the Passion had brought its realities still more vividly before her; and now in her enclosure Our Lord completed her enlightenment; so that His terrible sufferings were ineffaceably engraved on her mind. "Our Lord," she subsequently related, "Himself showed her and



permitted her to hear all the sufferings which for the love of men He had endured." Afterwards, when she directed her thoughts to the Passion of Christ, she became, "as it were, frozen and insensible." She spoke of it as "the most bitter Passion," and, when thinking of it, was filled interiorly with the bitterest sorrow. Many years afterwards, Sœur Perrine relates that whenever this Passion of Christ was brought before her mind, "no matter how this was done, whether by reading it herself, or hearing it recited, or in whatever way, immediately all her understanding was from all other occupations so transported, that for the space of many hours she neither thought of nor listened to any other matter."

At other times, she had visions of heaven itself, or else enjoyed for hours together that ineffable sense of the presence of God which enraptures the powers of the body and soul.

The devil often persecuted her. She knew him well,—him whom she calls "*l'homme ennemi*"; like all the saints, she saw him and suffered from his attacks. Even during the earliest days of her seclusion he had appeared to her. Had she then experienced those inevitable moments of discouragement which come to all recluses during the first days of their solitude? Possibly. The demon came to taunt her as a poor girl who did not realise the life she had entered upon and which she never would be able to endure. "Is it to this you looked forward with such joy?" he said to her. "See, you have got all that you asked for, but are you really satisfied? Never, never will you be able to remain here all your life!" Colette had replied that it would be easier for her, with God's friendship, to endure for a short time a life of

imprisonment, than for him to endure hell for eternity, with God's hatred and malediction. The demons kept on annoying her, sometimes suggesting various temptations, sometimes trying to bring scandal on her. One day the wall of her cell was suddenly rent asunder, leaving a large opening. Doubtless next morning the town would have been full of uncharitable gossip. But Colette prayed to Our Lady, whose image she placed on the wall, and the breach closed up again. She met the attacks of the demons with invincible confidence. They might cause her to suffer, but could not make her afraid. Later on, she bequeathed to her nuns this forceful saying : " Not all the power of the demon from hell can vanquish you if you do not wish to be vanquished." And she had nothing but contempt for his threats and his terrors.

Before long many curious eyes were turned towards the hermitage. People talked of the various phenomena observed there, of the ever radiant countenance of Colette, and of her long fasts. An ever-increasing number of people came to see her. Patient and gentle, she came as required to her wicket. And, recovering the burning eloquence of her former discourses, she was continually begging her unknown visitors to love God. " There is nothing in this world," she said to them, " no matter how worthy or how precious, which can compare with His most perfect love." The world, and everything belonging to it she described as " things transitory and of short duration." At other times she repeated the impressive words of Solomon : " Everything is vanity and affliction of spirit." In a life full of strange happenings not the least strange is to find a young girl so ignorant and unversed in world affairs speaking with such authority

and being listened to with such respect. People often came to consult her about difficult spiritual problems, or to confide to her their sufferings and sorrows. She never refused to listen, and knew well how to give comfort and help. But for sinners she had a special predilection,—those “poor weaklings” as she called them. It was to them that she most eagerly gave her help, communicating to them something of her own strength, so that they might escape “from the snares of the hellish enemy, and deliver themselves out of sin.” For them she came down from the sublimest heights of prayer, and, herself all inflamed and penetrated with divine love, exhorted and admonished them; then, leaving in the troubled souls of these “*povres défailants*” some faint reflection of her radiant countenance and surpassing purity, she would return to her ecstatic contemplation.

The priest of Notre Dame, Jean Guyot, of whose interest in Colette we have already heard, and who had acted towards her with such straightforward good sense sent his young brother to be instructed by her in religious matters. No higher proof of his admiration was possible. The boy used to come to the recluse for lessons. As a basis for these, she chose the Psalms, and her instructions consisted simply in reading aloud, and then commenting on these wonderful chants, now prophetic, now penitential of King David. This youth, Jacques Guyot, afterwards attained considerable success in life; his name is often met with in the archives of Corbie, where he was public notary; and as he lived to a good old age, it fell to his lot to be one of the four witnesses at Colette’s process of beatification. Later on we shall come across the evidence of this old man, who, at the time of which we are writing

was only a boy of thirteen or fourteen, somewhat surprised at being sent to learn his religion from a recluse, then much devoted to her, and who never forgot these great Psalms and the explanations given for his sole benefit beside Colette's cell.

More and more numerous did these visitors become. Colette's solitude was invaded to such an extent that her whole day was taken up in giving audiences, and her only time for prayer was during the night. Moreover, all sorts and conditions of passers-by came to her, some sincere, some merely curious, their resort thus becoming a great burden and inconvenience to her. So that one day, when the friar Jehan Pinet came to visit her, she begged of him to find some means of getting rid of them. The monk thereupon made for her a rule that she should have certain fixed hours each day for coming to her wicket to listen to those who had need of her ; but that outside those hours she should not be disturbed. Thence forward Colette was able to enjoy more of her silence and her contemplation.

At this time she had reached a high degree of perfection. She had vanquished her body, had brought it to the subjection enjoined by St. Paul ; she had become mistress of herself.

Asceticism, no matter of what sort, has no other end in view. According to one of her historians, it seemed as if " all wicked desires and evil inclinations were in her mortified and extinguished, because the body and all its senses were ready and prepared to obey the mind without demur, and the mind prepared to obey God. And she was always prompt to execute not alone the commands which she received from without, but also

respond to that knowledge and inspiration which God put into her heart or her thoughts."

Thus, purified and made docile by penance, having practised the virtue of charity and lived in constant prayer, she was in truth "ready"; and sublime revelations began.



"A great and terrible vision was shown and presented to her by God. In which vision she saw and knew in a general way all the estates of the Church, and of the secular world, from the greatest down to the least; and the government of each. Afterwards there were shown to her the faults and offences which, against God and to His displeasure, were committed by the rulers and government of each, and the horrible pains and grievous torments by which, in consequence, each would be punished according to his deserts."

She was filled with fear and sorrow at this sight. Next, she saw the place of these terrible "torments and punishments." We remember the indescribable fear of St. Teresa, when she had a similar revelation, and felt that it would be easier to die than to bear this terrible sight any longer. Hell was opened before Colette, so vividly, so really present to her eyes, that she was in constant dread of "slipping and falling in." Seven times was this vision repeated. She saw the souls of the dead whirling in millions above the abyss, like leaves torn from their trees by a tempest. Then the States again defiled before her, one after the other, with all their vices and crimes. In none of them did justice or order prevail. In all of them, "from the greatest down to the least" there was something misplaced or crooked, and even

the Church itself, as far as its human government was concerned, had its discords and defaults. If, indeed, we consider the times of which we are writing, that troubled dawn of the fifteenth century, full of discord, of vice, of wars, with money chief ruler of the world, what a dark picture Colette must have seen ! The sadness which it caused her seemed to permeate her soul so that she was continually haunted by it : haunted with sorrow for the innumerable offences against God, with pity for the innumerable lost souls. And then deadly fear came upon her ; the horrors of Hell seemed to come close and challenge her ; and when, on the eighth day, the last of these visions disappeared, she found herself holding on with both hands to the bars of her grating, which in her terror she had grasped, and from which her cramped hands were unable to detach themselves.

After this her prayers were unceasing. Day and night, an ardour of supplication kept her continually before God, begging that His mercy might spare the world, and that those unhappy sinners might be redeemed from evil and brought back to His service.

God then gave her to understand that this work would be accomplished by means of the reformed Orders of Saint Francis—" *par le moyen* (says the biographer) *des ordres réformés de monsieur Saint François.*"

Shortly before St. Francis was born, the then Sovereign Pontiff had a vision, in which Christ appeared in the heavens, full of anger against an ungrateful world, and resolved to send in wrath three angels to confound and to destroy it ; while Mary interceded for the guilty ones, presenting to the Lord two champions of His cause, Dominic and Francis. Now Colette, in another



vision, saw St. Francis on his knees before Christ, to whom he presented a woman, begging of His mercy that she should be placed at his disposal in order to restore the fervour of his Orders; so that his army, newly regenerated, might fight against vice and convert the "weaklings." And this presentation was "pleasant and agreeable" to the Master. St. Francis stipulated that this woman should be the leader and chief in his reform.

Colette was filled with joy at the thought that her beloved Franciscan Orders were to be raised to new fervour. But before long, having recognised the woman whom St. Francis was presenting to the Lord as no other than herself, she became very much distressed, very uneasy.

When Francis made his request, Christ inclined His head in sign of acquiescence.

But she, Colette, could not consent! From the very depths of her being came an impetuous refusal, which was her only response to this divine invitation.

God still insisted. As if it was necessary for Him to have man's assistance in accomplishing His works, it is His way to ask for help, without, however, exacting it; waiting, as it were, at the entrance to these souls, until their full and free consent gives Him access thereto. Here He put before His reluctant servant an urgent request which filled her with dismay. Her biographers tell us that she herself said afterwards how she felt as if God was actually asking her to do something, to which it was only right and fitting that she should agree. And day by day the will of God became more manifest and more irresistible.

Can we picture to ourselves the condition of a soul thus besieged :—where no word is spoken, and yet the will which importunes is more real, more powerful, more convincing than the most definite form of words ? When, ten years later the child, Joan of Arc heard her “ voices ” and she also, uneducated and uncultured like Colette, understood the dire condition of nations and of kings ; when, although urged by a compelling impulse to act and to “ go,” she resisted, and this impulse became a peremptory command, was it merely that there were two contending forces in her own mind, or was there really some invisible being who spoke and gave those orders to her ? How did these voices make themselves heard ? We do not know. St. Teresa—to whom we must constantly refer, because she alone, of these who have been favoured with wonderful visions, seems able to speak lucidly of them—explains that although nothing may happen which is perceptible to the senses, yet one may feel interiorly more certain and more convinced than by “ seeing ” with the eyes of the body.

Colette remained painfully undecided. She might perhaps have agreed to help this reform or to give it her support, but to be “ leader and chief ” (*première et principale*), how could she ? Sometimes she pleaded her want of ability. “ See, Lord, my ignorance ” she would say, “ I am only a poor girl who knows nothing.” Again she would shelter herself behind her vow of enclosure. “ How can I run about the world and work for you outside, O Lord, when it is through your will that I am enclosed within these walls for ever ? ” She resisted with all her strength ; she declared in all earnestness that she was a sinner, unworthy and useless for any great purpose.

God sent her another vision, full of benignity and sweetness this time. She saw again in the heavens Christ full of anger against men for whom His Mother was interceding. But while St. Francis, the "*Poverello*," accompanied this time by St. Clare, was presenting to him his faithful servant Colette, there on the other side of Our Saviour stood St. Mary Magdalen and St. John the Evangelist, who wished to claim this same Colette for the life of a recluse. Thus the dual impulse of Colette's soul was represented in a celestial strife. From each side of the young saint herself—the prize for whom they contended—these two groups of saints began to speak each in their turn, one set praising the joys of solitude and of a hidden life ; the other speaking of the attractions of a missionary's career, with its widespread influence for good. As she listened to the arguments on both sides, Colette, as before, found herself bewildered and uncertain. Our Lord then called on His Mother to decide the question ; whereupon Our Lady, taking Colette by the hand, presented her to St. Francis. Colette, while radiant with joy at the thought of remaining besides her Seraphic Father and Patriarch, at the same time felt her heart pierced with the thought of the sorrows thus foreshadowed.

Sometimes she feared that all these apparitions were the work of the Evil One—delusions, no more and no less, coming from the devil himself. The demons had persecuted her so cruelly that she knew well their arts. After they had first tried to discourage her, then to compromise her, she had been constantly annoyed by their presence. Incessant noises disturbed her ; she was obliged to listen, horrified, to wild wails and lamentations. Then the evil spirits had shown themselves under

terrible forms : her cell seemed full of frogs and loathsome insects, of huge serpents. These apparitions used at first to disappear on her making the sign of the cross ; but soon, becoming bolder and more malevolent, they could not be chased away except after long prayer. At last, finding it impossible to disturb her serenity her enemies tried to do her bodily harm—a form of attack by which many other saints have been harassed ; some, like the Curé of Ars, suffering almost continuously. For hours together the emissaries of hell had knocked her about, rained blows on her, wounded her, tormented her. Through all this, her patience and her faith in God had sustained her. Now, however, she feared that these new visions, these entreaties purporting to come from heaven, might perhaps be the work of demons in a new guise—the most insidious of all.

How was she to be sure that, by means of deceitful visions, they were not endeavouring to induce her, by some or any means, to leave her cell—that cell which was her rampart and her strength, and which she had so well called “ the strong castle of the King ” ?

She asked all her friends, including many priests, to pray for her. During this time, other visions appeared.

A tree suddenly grew up in her oratory,—a beautiful tree “ of great attractiveness and wonderful beauty ” all covered with leaves of a uniform and vivid green, and with flowers so yellow “ that one would have thought them of shining gold.” From the tree was wafted a delightful fragrance, and under its branches appeared a number of little trees, of less striking beauty than the large one, but well proportioned and covered with flowers. As this spectacle did not convey any special significance to

Colette, she attributed it to the devil, and hurriedly tore up all the trees and threw them out of her window. But very soon another tree appeared, increased in size, and flowered, while smaller trees sprang up, just as before, shedding their perfume around, and furthermore, on this occasion, moving about from one spot to another. Then Colette began to seek for some explanation of these curious happenings, and was inspired to believe that the large tree signified the Franciscan reform, and that the little trees were monasteries which were to flourish under its shades.

The friar Jehan Pinet, who came to see her from time to time and with whom she corresponded, succeeded at last in getting her to recognise the will of God, whose manifestations had hitherto disturbed and dazzled without convincing her. He himself had had a vision relating to her. She, his beloved spiritual child, had appeared to him in the middle of a vineyard, cultivating it, caring for it in every way, pulling up the weeds and tying up the vines. And while doing this, she experienced grievous sufferings and fatigues. This vision, confirming those she had had herself, made a strong impression on Colette.

Other people whom she consulted were unanimous in declaring that the call she heard in her soul was not the work of the devil, but of God ; that her own state of mind and her actions all went to prove that it was a divine influence which was inspiring her. She pondered deeply over all these sayings and occurrences, pointing in one direction ; and was much moved by all the admonitions she had received. But still she could not bring herself to consent.

During this anxious time Frère Pinet died. Realising

that he was in danger of death, and having always had a very great esteem of Colette and a profound conviction of her sanctity, he was anxious to die near her, so that she might help him on the last great journey. But Colette, although living the life of a mystic, was at the same time prudent and far-seeing. She put aside her desire to console the last moments of her venerated father in Christ ; and, on hearing that he had been brought to Corbie, she sent him word that it was not fitting for a religious to die outside his monastery. Frère Pinet accepted her decision and caused himself to be carried back to his convent at Hesdin. There he died a few days afterwards. Colette was apprised in a mysterious manner of the time of his death. While surrounded by devout women who had come to her wicket, she suddenly said : " Alas ! my kind father, Frère Jehan Pinet, has just now died. I have seen his soul going forth in glory to Paradise." It was, as a matter of fact, just at that moment that he expired. But his pious friendship with Colette was not cut short even by death. She herself subsequently told her nuns that he used to come every year to visit her, no matter where he was. He spoke to her gentle words of strength and consolation, and sometimes, to increase her humility, and as if speaking regretfully of a beloved past, he would say to her. " Colette, Colette, where is now the fervour of the time when you were a recluse ? " Perrine de la Vaux, in telling this, adds : " I heard this from our glorious Mother herself."

This fervour was now at its height. Colette might be truly said to live in Christ, her soul a flame of divine love, constantly in ecstasy, scarcely dwelling on this earth, completely united to God, ever closer to Him, sighs of



love ever soaring to heaven from her little oratory. Filled with divine grace, which pervaded her being with heavenly sweetness, she lived among miracles, and yet steeped herself in penance. Nevertheless she still withheld her consent ; she still refused the supreme gift which God desired to receive from her.

The simple fact was, that she had not the courage to leave her solitude, and face the risks and uncertainties of the great world. Her life was full of overpowering happiness, which she knew well would not be exhausted by time, and which only a life of solitude would permit her to enjoy unshadowed and uninterrupted. And, besides, a genuine humility, that of the saints, made her refuse a mission so great, so exalted. The idea that this mission was to depend mainly on her, that she was to be its pivot, its centre, was intolerable to her. She drew back from the heavy burden.

Then God began to treat her with severity. For three days she became dumb. Whenever she resigned herself to carry out God's will, she immediately recovered her speech ; but when dislike and apprehension overcame her again, she found herself unable to utter a word.

Then, during three days more, she became blind. The moment she gave her consent, the light became visible to her, but as soon as she began to hesitate, darkness again enveloped her.

Warned by these punishments, she began at last to fear that her refusal might offend God, might even be a sin. God was speaking very clearly ; she must obey Him. She recalled the numerous manifestations which had been vouchsafed to her, the impulses which had possessed her soul, the counsels given her by learned people, and the

fervour of her own prayers. Impossible that all these should be leading her astray ! So, her resistance finally overcome, she said to the Lord, in the words of the Blessed Virgin. " Behold your handmaid." In a prayer of supreme oblation she recommended herself to God, and submitted her will to His. She promised, that so far from placing obstacles in the way, she would faithfully follow every indication of that divine will.

Immediately, as if by magic, all her troubles ceased. Once she had given her consent, everything became clear, everything appeared easy. She understood clearly what her mission was to be ; her mind was filled with light, her will with resolution. The main outlines of her task developed themselves, in a clear and precise form before her mind ; so that in a few days she composed, in various separate and distinct articles, a memorandum of the revelations which she had had and of the work which she felt called upon to accomplish. This was the memorial which she presented some months later to the Pope Benedict XIII. It was probably about this time that a first attempt was made, by a Franciscan vicar, to obtain the Pope's sanction for the foundation (at some date not specified) of a monastery of Poor Clares in Picardy ; because we find that the first Bull of Benedict XIII. granting this authorisation for the dioceses either of Amiens or Arras or Noyon, is dated April 1406.

In order, however, to carry out her plans, the recluse needed help from outside. For this she waited, full of confidence.

We already know those who were coming to her help—the active-minded, generous Lady of Brissay, all the way from Besançon ; and, more important still, the saintly

Père Henri de la Roche et de la Baume, the Franciscan friar who was to be a father and friend to her all her life long. "A man of great perfection," says Pierre de Reims, "loving and fearing God from his childhood, knowing nothing and caring nothing about material or transitory matters, but wise and prudent in spiritual things, and pitiful and merciful towards poor sinners." Many a time Colette used to say that a sinner never left his presence without feeling comforted and strengthened; and that the number of those he brought back to God was past counting. We are also told that he never wearied of speaking of God.

It is easy to imagine the emotion and the joy experienced by Colette when these strangers presented themselves at her wicket with the kind curé Jean Guyot as their guide; with the dust of their long journey still covering them, and consumed with a zeal as great as her own. They seemed, indeed, the living proof that God had not deceived her, but, on the contrary, was upholding her, that He was preparing the way for her; that, in fine, her hope of a reformation and revival of fervour among the sons and daughters of St. Francis was not, as she had feared, an idle dream.

## CHAPTER III.

### HER EARLIEST FOUNDATIONS.

WHEN, towards the end of October or the beginning of November, 1406, Colette received from the Pope the powers and sanctions for which she had worked, she and her companions left Nice, intending to begin without delay the work of reformation. Her idea was to return to Corbie and inaugurate this work in her native country. So over the same long road, but this time travelling northwards, we see the little cavalcade making its way ; Henri de Baume, Colette, Madame de Brissay and some attendants. It was autumn. Colette, having attained her object, experienced a sort of reaction ; she felt weary and exhausted. Before her loomed an immense undertaking, with no practical means in sight by which it could be achieved. Instead of being, as she had hoped, an humble instrument in this work, she found herself its chief and leader. Her companions saluted her by the title of Abbess, conferred on her by the Pope ; when she corrected them, they insisted that they were right ; and their increased respect, their special care of her, made her aware of a new state of things, which she had scarcely realized during her audience with Benedict XIII. Much disturbed by her new dignities as well as by the burden thus imposed on her, she despatched a messenger to the Pope,

begging of him to undo what he had done, and to allow her to remain servant and not mistress in the "order of Madame St. Clare." He replied that he had not altered his views in the least ; that what had been done would not be undone, and he sent her a present of a beautiful breviary.

Colette resumed her journey. They passed through Nevers ; and there she felt seriously ill of a fever. Her companions believed that she was going to die. But at the worst stage of her illness, she saw a vision of the Blessed Virgin, who came close to her and kissed her on the lips, speaking at the same time kind and gentle words. From that moment she seemed to come from death to life. She said nothing, however, about the vision to her companions ; but later on she confided the story to Frère Henri, at a time that he was suffering from depression and discouragement, thus to give him fresh confidence and hope.

At Besançon the Baroness de Brissay returned to her home, sending on her attendants to accompany the two religious to Corbie.

It was a most deplorable home-coming ! The people had previously been puzzled and annoyed at Colette's departure ; they were now equally puzzled at her return. During her absence, the town had quite disowned her ; she who had been its glory was now a bye-word and a scandal there. " Adventuress," " visionary," " sorceress " ; such were some of the epithets hurled at her. No one would allow her into their house ; even her best friends, terrorised by public opinion, did not dare to receive her. She, who had been surrounded with every mark of respect by the Pope, the greatest sovereign in the world,

was now treated contumeliously by the rabble of a country town. It does not appear that a single person took her part. The curé, Jean Guyot, was perhaps not strong enough to resist the popular voice ; the Abbot of Corbie remained silent. The worst calumnies were circulated. We are not told in so many words that Frère Henri's name was mentioned in this scandalous gossip ; but it seems certain that this formed part of the "*vitupérables et exécrables paroles*" which followed her everywhere. She was accused of even graver offences, of dealings with the devil, of connivance with the infernal regions ; and at that time sorcery was looked on as the worst of crimes. It was said that she knew and practised witchcraft, and could read the future by the aid of the devil. And at the time the punishment for these crimes was hanging.

Thenceforth there began for her a period of solitude and ostracism, compared to which her voluntary isolation of the previous years seemed like a festival. Nowhere could she find a refuge ; she had given her own house to the poor ; her friends had closed their doors against her. She was obliged to take refuge in an old stone quarry on the outskirts of Corbie.

Thus deserted by all, she manifested both sides of her unusual personality. She accepted with meekness and patience, with a sort of sublime indifference, these insults and outrages, giving the idea of being wholly absorbed in a mystical world ; but at the same time her mission was never lost sight of ; she made plans, carried them out, went on organising and taking advantage of every opening.

She had asked for permission to begin her reform in Picardy, and so we find her at Amiens and Noyon, visiting the monasteries of St. Clare, and, where she may, ex-



horting the nuns to a more austere life. But everywhere she fails, because everywhere she is preceded by calumny and met with mistrust. Her enemies are truly implacable; they pursue her, they poison every mind against her; so that everywhere she is treated with contempt, everywhere looked upon as a reprobate. No one dares to be seen in her company. She is overwhelmed with humiliations.

She returned to Corbie without having met with the smallest success. One evening while in her quarry-cave on the banks of the Somme, she wept long, not for herself, but for her native town whose decline she foresaw and predicted. At length, after a whole year of troubles and repulses, Père de la Baume, realising that, as far as her native province was concerned, her efforts had been and would be quite useless, brought her by permission to a "strange land," to his own country—Savoy, where his brother Alard invited them to his house.\*

Colette left Corbie without any intention of ever coming back. But this time she did not leave it alone. Her two girl friends, Marie Sénéchal and Guillemette Chrestien, whose enforced separation from her had not lessened their affection, now went with her. Sooner or later apostles will find disciples; but the adhesion of these two must have brought great joy to Colette—the first she had experienced for fifteen painful months. All four departed secretly and at night. They went on foot, begging for alms along the road. At Dijon, they took a carriage for the three women, and a horse for the friar.†

\* "A little to the west of Annecy." (Sylvère).

† Jacqueline Legrand, another faithful friend of Colette's, joined them a short time afterwards.

When they arrived at the house of the Seigneur de la Baume, his wife was expecting the birth of a child, and grave fears were entertained as to her safe delivery. When Colette arrived, she was earnestly entreated to pray for the safety of mother and child. Her prayers were heard ; and this child, born on the night of her arrival in Savoy, was Perrine de la Baume, who afterwards wrote that life of her beloved superior on which the present work is so largely based.

It is very probable that the Countess de Chalons, Blanche de Genève, had promised her aid to Henri de la Baume before he decided to bring Colette and her friends to Savoy. We have already seen how, through his intervention, she had interested herself in Colette even before making her acquaintance ; and Père Henri had undoubtedly kept her informed of all their doings. In any case, the Countess immediately offered them a portion of her castle of la Balme-en-Genevois ; and it was there that the little community was installed, took shape, commenced in fact to exist. This castle, also called Grande-Balme, was one of the ancestral possessions of the Counts of Genevois ; it was situated at the foot of the mountain of Nandallaz, in the department now known as Haute Savoie.

There they remained for three years. Colette trained her first nuns there, and perfected herself in the art of guiding and directing young girls in a life of great austerity. In this she seems to have been successful from the beginning. This improvised monastery was fervent and cheerful. The sisters possessed nothing, lived on alms, and dearly loved their mother Colette. They did much good in the district around, where their presence was looked on

as a great blessing. Several young girls from the neighbourhood came to the convent. Colette, in the close intimacy of a small community living in such sisterly charity, made these first disciples of hers most perfect daughters of St. Clare, destined to reform other monasteries in the future. It was a time of great peace and much spiritual profit.

But of course it could only be a time of preparation and of waiting. This wing of a castle was not a monastery, and Colette had no sense of stability while there. Blanche de Genève wished her to found a convent near herself, at Rumilly. But how could she feel any security in bringing nuns to an open, unfortified town, exposed to all the dangers of war, to the fierce incursions of armed men ?

It was neither in Savoy nor in Picardy that the reform was destined to take root, but in Burgundy. Madame de Brissay was preparing the way for Colette at Besançon ; while a powerful princess was ready to co-operate with Blanche de Genève in furtherance of her work.

Blanche de Genève set about obtaining the authority of the Pope for the foundation at Besançon. Marguerite, Duchess of Burgundy, busied herself in obtaining for the monastery a remission of all taxes and also the protection of her husband, John the Fearless.

Although not equals in rank, the two princesses belonged to families of equal dignity. In spite of the difference in their ages, one being young and the other old, there were between them many ties, soon to be drawn still closer by Colette. Blanche was a vassal of Burgundy in respect of Chalon, which had been part of the duchy since 1237. Besides, she had a much loved niece, Mahaut de Savoie, daughter of her sister Catherine de

Savoie-Archie ;\* and this niece who always stayed with her and who looked on the childless old countess as a mother, was later on to become the niece of Margaret of Burgundy, through her marriage with Duke Louis of Bavaria, prince Palatine of the Rhine.†

Margaret of Bavaria, duchess of Burgundy, is somewhat overshadowed by the masterful personality of her husband, Jean sans Peur. She was about thirty years old when Colette first made her acquaintance. She was learned,‡ gentle and very pious.

Her formidable husband gave her little time for rest and quiet ; and as she seems to have loved him very sincerely, his ambitions, his enemies, his adventures, and his crimes, kept her in perpetual anxiety. She feared, not alone for the life of her husband, but for his salvation.

At this time the house of Burgundy was immensely powerful, almost royal. If their son Philip the Good, rivalled the House of France in magnificence, John the Fearless came next to it in power and in strength ; and in this his grandson, Charles the Bold, resembled him. While still a young man, and not yet in possession of his heritage Jean had displayed his physical prowess at the battle of Nicopolis. Later on, as duke, he became the ruler of very extensive dominions—of Burgundy, Charolais, Nevers, Rethel, of a portion of Champagne, of Artois, and of Flanders, while already putting forward

\* Mahaut was the sister of the holy woman now known as Blessed Margaret of Savoy.

† The Duchess of Burgundy, Marguerite of Bavaria, was the daughter of Duke Aubert Louis, called le Barbu (the bearded).

‡ The records of the library of the Dukes of Burgundy (see Doutrepont, *La Littérature à la cour des Ducs de Bourgogne*) contain entries relating to the loan of Latin and French manuscripts to Margaret.

claims at Brabant, Limburg, Holland and Hainault. Thereupon he found himself in a position full of temptation, one which has brought about the downfall of many,—that of arbitrator or umpire. In France, the mad King, Charles VI. was his first cousin ; its enemies all around were covetously watching the kingdom ; its queen, Isabeau, cared for little except feasting and amusements ; while he, John the Fearless, was strong, clear-headed, far-seeing, much in advance of his time ; why should he not be made Protector of France ? So he put his power to the test and caused Louis of Orleans, who was a hindrance to him, to be assassinated one morning at dawn, before the Porte Babette, at Paris.\*

It was this deed that first made his wife unhappy. Neither the well-recompensed discourse of the theologian Jean Petit† given at the Hotel St. Pol before representatives of the army, nobility and clergy, upholding this murder as an act of true patriotism, nor the pretended reconciliation and displays of affection between the duke and the dead man's children, could convince her that this deed was really justified. Her husband might succeed in deluding himself on the point, but her conscience had a clearer vision ; and she set herself to redeem his soul by good works. To these, as we shall see, he was always ready to give a helping hand, at the request of " his very dear and much loved lady."

It was during the year following the assassination of the

\* Louis of Orleans was leaving the house of his mistress, Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France. Jean sans Peur gave this as an excuse for the murder.

† He was a doctor of theology, but not a Dominican, as has sometimes been asserted.

Duke of Orleans—1408—that facilities for establishing herself in Besançon were placed at Colette's disposal by Marguerite. The principal residence of the dukes of Burgundy was at Dijon, while their favourite home was the castle of Rouvres, between this town and Auxonne. Besançon had, however, acquired considerable importance from the fact that Parliament had recently been transferred there. To this town, then, "formerly the city of gold" (Chrysopolis) Colette was invited, in order to take possession of a monastery where there lingered on two "Urbanist Poor Clares," sole remnant of a flourishing community which at one time was peopled by the noblest young girls of the country. It had been brought to the verge of extinction by the blighting influence of relaxed rule and discipline. On the 27th January, 1408, Benedict XIII. authorised Colette to take possession of this convent, stipulating only that the two nuns who remained there were to be maintained by her.\*

However, Colette did not take advantage of this authorisation until two years later. During this interval, a new pope, elected by the council of Pisa, confirmed this Bull.

When at length Colette and her little community started on their journey, the Countess of Geneva herself accompanied them, as well as her niece Mahaut of Savoy. The countess brought a numerous train of attendants, amongst them being an equerry, whose name we are not told, but who had the greatest reverence for Colette. He showed the most profound respect when attending on her, and said that he always seemed to see her surrounded by a halo of golden rays.

\* Bull *Dum attenta* . . . 27 Jan., 1408. (See translation No. 1038.)



Already, indeed, Colette held widely the reputation of being a saint. To this reputation and to the hopes founded on her projected reform we must attribute the extraordinary welcome which she was given at Besançon. The Archbishop, Thibault de Rougemont, decided to receive her with public honours. The town and the clergy, duly notified by him, made preparations for this auspicious event ; and he himself, attended by his priests and a large crowd, went along the road as far as Beurre, where they met her on the 14th March 1410. Blanche de Genève placed Colette and her little flock under the protection of the Archbishop. He saw coming towards him a group of eight nuns, including Colette. As was her custom when not specially required by anyone, the saint was praying, with her hood down, quite unaware of what was taking place.

" Mother," said the Archbishop to her, " will you not raise that veil, to please these people who are so much interested in you ? " Throwing back her veil, Colette became suddenly aware of the honour which was being paid her, of the great crowd of people come to meet her. She was frightened and confused ; and when the Archbishop invited her into his carriage, she wished to refuse ; and it was only in deference to his authority that she consented to make this triumphal entry into Besançon.

Arrived at the monastery close to the cathedral, she fell into an ecstasy, out of which she could not be aroused, and which lasted eight days. She was completely unconscious of what was going on around her. The report spread through the town, and the monastery was besieged. The people insist on seeing her in her cell.

Meanwhile there are many things to be attended to and it is very necessary that the Abbess should return to everyday life ! Père de la Baume gives the word of command. " Mother," he says, " return to us ! The community needs you." Obediently Colette returned to her normal state, still glowing with divine love, overflowing with zeal and praising God. " Her words concerning Him " says one of her biographers, " pierced one like arrows."

More anxiously, perhaps, than anyone else, the two Urbanist nuns awaited Colette's return to consciousness. Doubtless they felt a certain amount of embarrassment and also of curiosity. Colette took them aside and explained to them the life which henceforth would be led in the monastery ; giving them a free choice as to whether they would stay with her or go away. One of them, named Odile, dismayed at the austerity of the rule, joined the Bernardines ; the other, Simonette, remained with the new superior.

Colette examined their new home and seemed satisfied with it. It was neither large nor luxurious. One fault only did she find ; that there were certain annuities attached to it. She never rested until these were disposed of. Money was always looked on as an enemy. So she worked and plotted and planned until she got the authorities of Besançon to convert these annuities into foundations for chaplaincies. Some ready money which remained was distributed among the hospitals of the town. When nothing was left, except the four walls of the monastery and eight nuns entirely without resources, depending on charity and their own humble work for what was literally their daily bread, then, and not till then, did Colette

feel perfectly happy ; and the convent begun in this way was so joyful and so devout that postulants came flocking to it.

Colette sifted them with an unerring instinct. Many of those who presented themselves at the convent were not acceptable to her. One of those who have written about her, the Abbé de Saint-Laurent, tells us that there were three classes towards whom from the first she showed herself very much on her guard : First, young girls whose reputation was in the least doubtful, or who showed themselves worldly or frivolous. These latter she used to recognise by a certain " flow of talk " which with her was always suspect. Secondly, widows. She was of opinion that it was very difficult for them to detach themselves from the world. Thirdly, certain people professing great piety. She used to say that they had " a secret vanity and pride " and not enough docility, and that they were usually too much attached to their own particular pious practices. " They would rather," she said, " hear several masses than say their Hours well and at the proper time, and the ordinary confessors of the convent never seem to suit them."

What she really liked was the normal girl, young, well-balanced, alert, ready to give herself generously without counting the cost and without reserve.

So far, Colette had not shown any miraculous powers, or, at least, they have not been recorded. But from the time she sets foot in Besançon she begins to move in that atmosphere of miracles which we find surrounding her for the rest of her life. All at once she became celebrated, manifesting powers so great that they became to her something of a burden and a trial. The long ecstasy

which began immediately after her arrival had excited the greatest wonder and respect throughout the city. Then, a few days afterwards, a woman presented herself at the monastery, suffering from nervous disease and from epilepsy. She was brought into a room, where she fell down in a very severe epileptic fit. Colette was most willing to intercede for her, but she felt that the woman herself had not sufficient faith. Three times did she come back to the room where the patient was struggling, held down forcibly by several women.\* She felt it necessary to rebuke her severely : " My child," she said, " it is on account of your want of faith that your malady continues," until she at last succeeded in inducing the patient to make an act of perfect confidence in God ; whereupon a complete cure was obtained and the patient sent away quite well. After that the sick came to Colette from all sides ; and at last a dead child was brought to her.

It was an infant which had only lived a few moments after birth. In the ingenuous hope that the Sacrament of Baptism would restore it to life, it had been taken to the Church, but was brought back to its mother in the

\* " While she was in this fit, a strong woman held her round the body, and she was bound and tied round the waist by a strong and good belt which was firmly held by two strong women, each of them at one of the ends of the aforesaid strap ; and in front of the patient there were four women, of whom two held one of her bare arms, and the others similarly the other arm. And while relieving each other in turn the said women held the said Margaret with all their strength, some in front and some behind. And several times these women were so fatigued by the effort of holding her that they agreed to call in men to hold on, so as to relieve the women. And when the said Margaret came before Colette, the master of theology began to tell and declare to her the maladies of the aforesaid. And when she had heard she was much astonished." (Pierre de Vaux.)

same inanimate condition. Then they went to implore Colette's intercession. While she was praying the little body was wrapped in a scarf belonging to the saint. Presently the child returned to life. Her parents gave her the name of Colette, and consecrated her in advance to God, as had been done in the case of Alard de la Baume's little daughter. She became a Poor Clare, and Perrine, who tells the story, says that at the time when she was writing, this nun, Colette Prusette, was still alive in the Convent of Besançon.

During her long life, Colette was to raise from the dead no less than four people. This gift of the highest form of miracle, one very rarely granted to women, is, in Colette's case, placed beyond any doubt, by the fact that these four resurrections were cited during the process of her beatification.

The second person whom she raised from the dead also belonged to Besançon. He was named Jehan Boisot, and was fifteen years old. At the time that Perrine was writing her biography he was still alive. His heartbroken parents could not resign themselves to lose their boy, and the powers attributed to Colette seemed to offer a last chance of holding him from death. At all events, they decided to make the attempt. They carried the bier to the convent chapel, and the father and mother implored of Colette to give them back their son. It was early in the morning. Colette made no reply and went to hear Mass. And then, as if she had made use of the Holy Sacrifice on behalf of this child, she commanded him to arise, and he lifted himself off the bier and walked. When Perrine was writing, about forty years later, he was a well-to-do citizen of Besançon, of whom nothing note-

worthy is related, and whose descendants can be traced down to the end of the eighteenth century.

It is easy to imagine the startling reports, the fame and renown, which would result from these events. Soon the name of this new thaumaturgus was known far and wide throughout Burgundy. To the people of those days, with their lively faith, their strong leanings towards superstition, and their keen interest in anything savouring of the marvellous, the gift of miracles seemed the highest of all possible gifts. To them it proclaimed the divine mission of a man or woman far more strongly than their genuine sanctity, of which it is in reality nothing more than an aspect, an attribute. Still-born children were brought to Colette in hundreds. If any of these were restored to life, we are not told of it. We do know that many remained lifeless. Colette herself—and we cannot do better than learn this wisdom of hers—insisted, and tried to make everyone understand, that it was the faith of the parents which might bring about the miracle. As for herself, the instrument of God's omnipotence, she considered herself simply as the intermediary of the parents, and declared that she could do nothing without them. It seemed as if she found it necessary to support herself on hearts filled with a conviction of that divine power to which they had recourse.\* She also implored of her nuns not to attribute to her any exceptional gifts. The respect which they could not help showing her after these marvellous happenings filled her with uneasiness and pain. She would indeed have liked to keep out these suppliants altogether. All she could succeed in

\*In this Colette followed strictly the traditions of the Gospel. "Go in peace, your faith has made you whole," says Christ.



doing, however, was to limit their visits to fixed hours every day. As at Corbie, as at la Balme-en-Genevois, crowds came that she might listen to them and speak to them, giving comfort and strength. But when she had accomplished her part or obtained from God some extraordinary favour, she used to shut herself up in her cell, where she remained for hours, sometimes for days ; she immersed herself in prayer, profoundly humble, even sad ; she refused to eat or to sleep ; and her nuns, coming in secret to watch over her, found her prostrate on the ground, with tears on her face.

\* \* \*

The Duchess of Burgundy, finding so remarkable a woman among her subjects, was anxious to see Colette, to converse with her, to secure her attachment and esteem. Most people in exalted positions, or even those eminent in some small degree, make a point of having at their table anyone of special note in their vicinity. In order to win Colette, Marguerite adopted an excellent plan ; she sent her chief chamberlain, Guillaume de Vienne\* to her, offering to found a monastery at Dijon, her capital.

Colette found herself much embarrassed. It is true that this time she had quite a sufficient number of perfectly-trained religious to found a new convent, and was intensely eager to extend her work of reform. On the other hand, from her point of view, the town of Dijon was much too important and too worldly ; the presence

\* Guillaume de Vienne, surnamed "The Wise," a noble of the Orders of St. George and of the Holy Cross, founder of the Confraternity of St. George. The town of Vienne is situated near Seurre, in the Côte-d'Or. Guillaume de Vienne also owned the castle of Rupt-sur-Saone, near Gray, as well as a mansion at Auxonne.

of the court of Burgundy made it unsuitable for the establishment of a poor and hidden convent such as she wished for. Then, again, the Countess of Geneva was pressing for a convent at Rumilly, a place which also appeared unsuitable to Colette, as the town had no defences. And lastly Guillaume de Vienne suggested a foundation at Gray. While Colette did not intend to carry out the wishes of the Duchess of Burgundy, neither did she wish to lose her powerful help. So she decided to go and see her.

It would appear that Colette was well acquainted with the different sites in Burgundy, and with their various advantages and disadvantages. She had already made her choice. Either she herself had visited these places or she had sent Père de la Baume to survey the country. When she presented herself at the ducal palace at Dijon, she felt deeply moved. She knew, as her chroniclers tell us, that, short of the dwellings of kings, this was the most important house in all Christendom; and she trembled as she went up the steps of the imposing mansion, amid men-of-arms and gorgeously dressed attendants. Margaret of Bavaria received the religious with great kindness, but before long they seemed to change places, and it was Colette, humble and unassuming, who took the lead with the princess, while the princess strove to please and make herself agreeable to Colette. This was not their only interview, for we know that the duchess kept her visitor at the palace for several days. Colette, while objecting to found a monastery at Dijon, was able to make her sovereign understand the reasons for her objections. Not in a large town, said she, nor yet in a small, undefended town; but in small and fortified cities. These must

necessarily have a sufficient population to ensure the Poor Clares the necessities of life, while not sufficiently populous to turn the nuns aside from their appointed work by the distractions of the world or spoil them by providing too lavish a supply of alms. A fortified town seemed indispensable, as such protection was necessary for women. And when Margaret asked her where she really did wish to establish her second convent she immediately replied : " Auxonne." This was a small, fortified town, on the borders of the Burgundian dominions, just on the frontiers of Burgundy and of Franche Comté. Margaret made numerous objections. Colette was able to overcome them. As the foundress was not willing to come to Dijon, the princess herself considered Auxonne the next best choice, because her chateau of Rouvres, the favourite residence of the Dukes of Burgundy, where her son Philip had been born, was situated between the two towns.

So Colette went at once to Auxonne, where she selected the site of her convent ; it was a little hill near the Saône, where there stood two houses, one belonging to the Duke of Burgundy, the other an appanage of his. The first was known as "*la maison des sous*." Philip the Bold used to mint counterfeit money there, outside the French kingdom \* ; the other and less important house, was owned by a nobleman, Symon de Saint-Aubin, who held it in fief from the duke. Colette made up her mind to have these houses bought and pulled down, and then to build her convent on their site.

\* It would seem that John the Fearless also continued this practice, either at Auxonne or elsewhere. See Dechamps de Pas ; *Contrefaçon des monnaies de Charles VI. par Jean sans Peur, Duc de Bourgogne et Comte de Flandre* ; in the *Revue Numismatique*, B. XII. (1867).

Unfortunately the people of Auxonne had no money to spare. We find Colette interviewing them ; receiving visits from the notabilities of the town, and going to visit them. They all were in difficulties. Nevertheless, Colette liked them very much ; they were so impetuous, frank, generous, and polite. They were as anxious as she was for the convent of " La Vielle-Monnaie " ; but " the smallness of their means made them hesitate," says Sylvère, " before so costly an enterprise." Colette then sent her usual ambassador, Henri de la Baume, to the nobleman, Guillaume de Vienne, to inquire whether he would be willing to devote to Auxonne the gifts promised by him if the convent were established at Gray. The chamberlain did not decide all at once. No doubt, most people who undertake works of charity like to get the credit due to them ; hidden glory is no glory ! It was, no doubt, as hard on Guillaume de Vienne not to be able to point to " his " monastery at Gray as it was on Marguerite de Bourgogne not to have " her " convent at Dijon. Nevertheless, he consented, just as the duchess had done. Simultaneously, Colette succeeded in inducing the Countess of Geneva to make a similar act of renunciation, so that she received for Auxonne the price of the stones at Rumilly.

One important authorisation had still to be obtained, that of the duke himself, since La Vielle Monnaie was his own property, and more especially the "*maison des sous*," where his father used to coin crowns and louis d'or. Jean sans Peur was at this time at Paris. Not without cause had it been said that the peace between himself and the Armagnacs had been " double-lined with malice." The famous mule, on whose back Jean and the

son of his victim had journeyed together, in token of reconciliation, had not carried them very far. They were now bitter enemies. All around Paris the Armagnacs kept watch. In travelling from Burgundy it would be necessary to cross their lines in order to get into Paris, where Jean sans Peur, supported by the people, by the Universities, by the citizens, was playing the part of a liberty-loving prince, eager to throw aside outworn traditions. In order to reach him and place in his hands the petition of his wife and of Guillaume de Vienne concerning Colette Boillet, it would be absurd to call on the services of a soldier like Guillaume de Vienne; the choice of Colette and her friends consequently fell on the useful Henri de la Baume, whose religious habit would be both passport and safeguard wherever he went.

He showed himself worthy of his noble mission. At the Hotel d'Artois he met Jean sans Peur, who, unlike his handsome father and son, was anything but prepossessing in appearance. Short and thickset in figure, with an enormous head, utterly lacking in dignity, his clothes patched, his manner of speaking abrupt and uncouth, he was, nevertheless, a ruler far more awe-inspiring than either his predecessor or his successor. Fiery and passionate, yet was he so clear-sighted that he could often divine friendly or hostile intentions at a glance. To the request conveyed by Henri de la Baume, he consented at once. "Immediately," says Fodéré, "he caused letters patent to be despatched, sealed with a great seal in green wax, hanging by a silken cord, and signed by his own hand, at Paris, on the 3rd of August, 1412, addressed to the Chamber of Accounts at Dijon, and to his treasurers and receivers."

His grant was set forth as follows : “ We bestow, with full knowledge and as a special favour by these presents, for God and as a charitable gift, our rights, share and portion—in this place and grounds, no matter of what kind.—For we will and desire that our cousin William \* or his representatives shall found for the praise, reverence and honour of God and of His divine service, a monastery of the Franciscan nuns of the Order of St. Clare ; and that our most dear and most beloved consort the duchess, and our heirs and successors shall participate in the Masses, intercessions, prayers, and other works of charity and benevolence which will take place within the said monastery.” “ We charge,” he added, “ our trusty accountants that they hold and confirm the religious of the said monastery, free and discharged from all payments.”†

Pope John XXIII., on his part, despatched the Bull authorising the erection of the convent on the 25th September, 1412.

Colette then selected the nuns who were to form the community in the convent of Auxonne. We are told that there were two from Picardy and three from Franche-Comté, and one of the latter was chosen as Abbess—a young nun for whom Colette had a special affection. She was named Agnes de Vaux, and came from Vaux, near Poligny ; her uncle, Pierre de Vaux, of whom we shall hear more later on, was a Franciscan at Dôle. We also know the names of three other sisters—Agnes Tinquerie, Marguerite and Marie Estocquette.

\* Guillaume de Vienne.

† Archives of Dijon. *Lettres Patentes de Jean sans Peur*. Quoted by Bizouard.



The people of Besançon, seeing Colette preparing for departure, took alarm. They remonstrated, in fact reproached her for wishing to leave them. She was besieged by people, some deeply grieved, some very indignant. But Colette managed to pacify them, declaring that she was not leaving for good, and that she would certainly return after founding the convent at Auxonne. It was only on this condition that they allowed her to go.

She placed her nuns in a waggon covered with an awning of heavy canvas ; as for herself, she sometimes rode on a donkey, and sometimes went in the waggon. Père Henri walked near her with a lay brother, Frère Pierre Psalmon, who accompanied him as a companion and assistant. When leaving Besançon, sitting on her donkey, she fell into an ecstasy. Her face became radiant, the light being reflected all around her, as far as Père Henri, who was leading the ass. People who were in the fields came running to look at her ; some knelt down on the road, some came close to her and touched her garments. Sœur Perrine, following Agnes de Vaux's account, tells us of the marvels of this journey. Colette saw nothing ; she remained immoveable, her face raised towards heaven. The country people, becoming bolder, touched her hands and her feet without her being aware of it. She remained in this condition until they got to Dôle. There the pilgrims stopped, and the nuns went to lodge in a little cottage, opposite the monastery of Franciscan friars.

Now, Colette had determined to visit this monastery. She knew that, unless the friars set an example of reform, her mission could not be really successful, could not hope to have a reasonable chance of lasting results. She

had already been in touch with this convent at Dôle, her friend Agnes de Vaux forming a link of communication through her uncle Frère Pierre de Vaux. This friar was himself anxious for reform, having spent several years in a community of the Observance in the environs of Poitiers—one of the first convents where the reform of Nicolas de Trinci and of Bernardine of Sienna had penetrated from Italy. He would willingly have regenerated Dôle on the same lines. But he was in a minority ; only one other friar, Francis Claret, who was equally devout, understood him and felt the same regrets and desires. This Pierre de Vaux was destined to be for many years the confessor of Colette, and to write her history. Whether she had already met him or not we do not know. But he would easily have known all about Sœur Colette and her career thus far ; indeed we find that friars in all parts, whether perfect or imperfect, professed to entertain for her the greatest admiration. It is not improbable that her friend, Père de la Baume, had already interviewed the friars at Dôle ; he, as we know, had been specially charged by the pope to promote, under Colette's direction, the reform of the First Order, and with this purpose in view had travelled and toiled unremittingly.

In any case, the friars of Dôle, as soon as they heard that Sister Colette was in the town, just opposite their house, went at once to seek her, and brought her to their convent with demonstrations of great joy. Going into their church she was again transported in ecstasy ; this somewhat distressed the community, who had hoped to converse with her and hear her speak. When she returned to herself, she was, as usual, glowing with the love of God. The friars then begged her to come to their

chapter-house, and Colette followed them submissively. Père Henri de la Baume and all the other brethren went into their stalls and kept silence. Then, seated on a little stool in the middle of the chapter-house, Colette spoke to them. With fervent eloquence she dwelt upon the love of Our Lord for them and their obligations to Him ; she pointed out to them the beauty of their religious state and also its responsibilities and requirements. Then, coming to principal matters, she took up her favourite theme—evangelical poverty—Franciscan poverty, begging of them to return to its practice ; and while she was yet speaking of what she boldly called its delights, little by little she was again caught up into supernatural regions ; the divine love which she was preaching to others carried her away, the words died on her lips, and the discourse ended in an ecstasy. The Franciscans knelt down and praised God. They were, for the moment at least, completely overcome.

“ *De retour de son ravissement,*” as Sœur Perrine beautifully expresses it, she bade farewell to the brethren, recommending herself to their prayers, and went back to her little cottage. At dawn next day she resumed her journey. Agnes de Vaux, who had witnessed her ecstasies, wished to have the happiness of holding her in her arms, while she should again fall into this state. Accordingly she arranged that she should sit next Colette in the waggon. Very soon the saint, who never ceased praying, was away in mystical remoteness, and as soon as she no longer knew what was happening around her, Agnes encircled her with her arms, drew her to her breast, and held her thus until they arrived at the gates of Auxonne. The saint meantime breathed deep but tranquil sighs, her

face shining brightly, her body exhaling a fragrant perfume.

As at Besançon, a great crowd came to meet the saint. There was the Mayor, Messire Mol, the aldermen, the parish priest, Pierre Esserces, several other priests, many men-at-arms, with Guillaume de Vienne; then a large general crowd. Colette got down from the waggon, and with great humility went into the city, riding on an ass, as if she had been the servant of her nuns. Just as she entered the city and was about to cross the drawbridge, demons were seen throwing themselves into the Saône—creatures of horrible appearance, and uttering loud cries. The place at which this happened went by the name of “Damno,” as it was there that those condemned to death were hanged. The people saw in this occurrence a sign of the sanctity of Colette, whose approach caused the powers of hell to flee; for there was a general belief in the Middle Ages that demons haunted the places of execution. So, the evil spirits having fled, the procession entered by the Dampenot gate.\*

Colette's entry into Auxonne, which is recorded in the archives of the town, took place on October 28th, 1412. At this date the convent was not yet built. The nuns established themselves provisionally in a house near the Church of Notre Dame. Colette got Guillaume de Bussul, Abbot of Luxeil, to bless the work, and she herself superintended the construction of the building. She was quite determined on strict poverty, on having nothing that was not strictly necessary in its proportions and decoration; in fact, on returning after her absences, she used to make the builders pull down or remove whatever

\* *Sainte Colette et les Clarisses en Franche-Comté.* By Bizouard.

seemed to her too luxurious or too spacious. So that the final result was a tiny little monastery, where the cells were so small and so low that, according to Fodéré, one would have thought them "dwelling-places for bees, rather than for women." This monastery had, nevertheless cost a certain amount of money, and for a short time Colette had been somewhat embarrassed by its indebtedness. But at the height of her trouble five hundred crowns of gold, newly minted and shining, came mysteriously to her aid. What she described as "a moderate building," and which everyone else considered very poor and inadequate, pleased her very much, and she installed her nuns there. The Duchess of Burgundy was present at the inaugural ceremony ; she, like others, thought the convent too small, and as Colette refused to have any improvements made, she insisted that she would at least build a chapel to please herself ; which she accordingly did. This chapel and convent together were known as the *Ave Maria* and under this name became famous throughout Franche-Comté.

Meanwhile, the feelings aroused by Colette's visit to the friars of Dôle had completely unsettled that monastery. Some of the community, led by Pierre de Vaux and François Claret, pressed for reformation ; the others disregarded these importunate devotees, and declined to renounce their comfortable mode of living. These were headed by Jean Foucault, the Superior of the convent, or "Guardian" according to Franciscan terminology. He was a man of good family, with a keen intellect and a good deal of learning. In the town he was regarded with great affection. He was genial, good-tempered, and a pleasant companion. During his two terms of office as

Guardian, he had built an addition to the monastery in which he reserved apartments for his own use. Being well provided with monetary resources—the result of his long-continued possession of uncontrolled authority—he used to entertain friars and seculars alike in his rooms. Certainly there was a vast difference between such a monastic installation and the ideal friary of St. Francis. Foucault was not particularly pious ; he often dispensed himself from saying office, and liked all the good things of this world. His quarters included “ a beautiful room, an ante-chamber, an office, a fine bed, suitable furniture, a flower garden, a fine view, fine clothes, and fine linen.”

Into the midst of this easy-going good-fellowship came Frère Henri de la Baume, who, gaining the goodwill and assistance of several of the friars, set about re-establishing regular order and discipline, in accordance with the severe ideas of Colette. The reforms begun were concerned with the cells, the furniture, the religious habit, and the food ; and soon the rule of St. Francis was observed to the letter in the daily life of this convent. But there were, naturally, friars who objected to these changes. Jean Foucault and two others, furious with the unwelcome reformers, asserted that their possessions had been unlawfully taken from them. No doubt the pretty little building wherein Frère Jean liked to enjoy himself and receive his friends, had not been left untouched ; nor those revenues and donations which had enabled him to live so liberally. He proclaimed loudly that he had been robbed and began a law-suit with the disturbers.

It seems to have turned out a long and complicated business, from which, however, Colette and her supporters emerged with credit and ultimate success. While the



case was going on, Foucault, popular and adroit as he was, won over to his side many of the judges and witnesses, so that at one time the reforming party thought they had lost their case. The councillors were equally divided. Colette was at the time at Besançon. One of the councillors of the court at Dôle, Maître Estienne de Granval, set off to interview her and suggest that she should compromise the matter. However, as he was going along, whether it be that he was re-considering the whole matter during his solitary journey, or whether, as the legend states, Colette appeared and discoursed to him, he began to realise more clearly what this process meant, and turned back. Then he argued with his colleagues so logically and forcibly that he won over their votes, and Jean Foucault found that he must either accept the reform or leave the convent.

He left it in a great rage, accompanied by his two followers. It is said that they retired into a village of Burgundy and led a dissolute life there.

But Colette did not love strife, and, while these disputes were going on, had endured much anguish of mind. It seemed to her that the attempt to rebuild the house of St. Francis was doomed to utter failure if the friars of this monastery could not be brought back to his Rule. While the lawsuit was going on, she appeared utterly disconsolate, and fell ill; nay, even whether it was that she felt her task too heavy for her, or simply from that desire for death which is common among the saints, she expressed a longing to die. Afterwards she told those around her that, during her illness, she had seen the heavens open, and, before Our Lord seated on a throne, two saints whom she specially loved, Magdalen and Clare,

asking that she might die and join their company. But then St. Francis made the opposite demand, saying : " Alas, Sire, did you only give her to me in order to take her away so soon ? " Francis prevailed in this heavenly debate, and Colette recovered. But when she found herself improving, and her health coming back, she said to her sisters : " Alas ! St. Francis, good man, does not wish me to die. I am not at all pleased."

Once she was free to act according to her wishes and her zeal, she made great changes in the friary of Dôle. Francis Claret became master of novices, while Pierre de Vaux, who was henceforth her confessor, was retained by Colette as her special assistant. He and Claret helped to spread the reform in many places and worked for it with great ardour. Henri de la Baume, hitherto so closely associated with Colette, became a sort of vicar specially concerned with the reform, and a non-official visitor to the convents.

Meanwhile Jean Foucault, although out of sight, found means to give serious trouble. All his friends in the town had sided with him. They blamed extremists and zealots who had taken possession of this worthy man's monastery ; they regretted the friendly Father Guardian who had been driven from his home among them. To avenge him, they cut off supplies from the present occupants of the friary, declaring with a kind of Rabelaisian logic that, as these friars wished to fast, they (the townspeople) would help them to do so. Neither alms nor food, consequently, came to the convent, where there were then, according to Sœur Perrine, about fifty brethren. Colette was then at Besançon. But Agnes de Vaux, Abbess of the Ave Maria at Auxonne, was told of this critical state of things ; and

for a whole year she had the bread they required made twice a week and sent on to them. The nuns had at this time in their granary only sixty or seventy bushels of wheat, but they courageously kept on making bread for the friars, and it was carried from Auxonne to Dôle by a diminutive donkey, who quickly became celebrated throughout the country around. As for the wheat, which never ran short all the year, no one knew exactly where it came from. The nuns always found their granary full. But the need for miracles did not last very long. The hostility of the people of Dôle gradually died down, and the little donkey and the trudging lay brother were able to cease their faithful service.

These vicissitudes of trial and trouble had been encountered with much good humour and even with joy such as befits the apostolic spirit and such as has often gone with the first trials of a generous undertaking. The monastery at Dôle was now a nursery of good and sturdy plants; it formed a connecting link between the growth of the Italian reform and those of Western France; through it the movement towards stricter observance was destined to spread as far as Flanders.

Colette's personal influence on this convent was very great. She frequently visited it. But during the years 1412, 1413, 1414 and 1415, her life became nomadic. At different times we find her at Besançon, at Auxonne, at Dôle, and at the castle of Rouvres, where the Duchess of Burgundy was spending more and more of her time, and which was soon to be her permanent residence. Colette sometimes spent an entire week at the monastery of Dôle. We would much like to know the names of the friars who then surrounded her, and the details of the work carried

on by them, more especially of their visits to foreign lands, by means of which the convent became a centre of activity in the Franciscan Order. Many interesting accounts must have arrived there ; we can gather as much from the events which followed, but we are not favoured with these narratives. All we know of, is the renewal of courage, of energy, of goodwill, brought about by Colette's visits. She listened, advised, and encouraged, setting right all the troubles of the community, and when she left, neither invalid nor grumbler was usually to be found.

But the reform of an order is an enormous undertaking as has been said by Père Hilarion de Nolay, whom Bizouard quotes, " It is a harder task than to straighten an old oak." A great number of friars allowed themselves to be definitely drawn towards a stricter and more zealous life ; but many others refused, and, entrenching themselves behind their rules, their authorisations, their privileges, their customs, they persisted in their former way of living and declined to allow changes in it. Before long, as the number of the reformed increased, so also did the number of the opposition ; and a day came when the malcontents felt strong enough to unite and lift up their voices.



From what we know of the Franciscan Order, it is not difficult to trace the outlines of this conflict. The reformed, whom we shall group under the general heading of Observants, had a great source of strength in the fact that everywhere there were saints leading them on. This was the time when Bernardine of Sienna and his disciples were at work in Italy. At this time, frontiers

were less of a barrier than we are to-day inclined to believe ; there was a good deal of intercourse between different countries ; so that the Franciscans at Dôle felt the reverberations of the Italian revival as well as of that which was taking place in the French and Burgundian provinces. On the other hand, those who are known as the Conventuals, that is to say, the conservatives of the Order, who desired to have full joint ownership of their convents, and with sufficient property to administer them, had been duly authorised to do so by various popes. So how could there be question (they asked) of " reforming " them ?

At this particular time, " the pope " was unhappily represented by three different persons. Benedict XIII. and Gregory XII. had both been declared deposed by the pseudo-Council of Pisa. The aged Alexander V., elected by the same council, had quickly been replaced by the man who had arranged the whole pseudo-conciliar proceedings, namely, Balthasar Cossa, formerly (it is said) a pirate on the coast of Sicily, but now claiming to wear the papal tiara as John XXII.\*

In order to put an end to this intolerable situation, the Emperor Sigismund, acting on the instigation of Cossa, who hoped to turn imperial and conciliar conflicts to his

\* " This election had come as a great surprise to the faithful, for everyone knew of Balthasar and his doings ; his tyranny at Boulogne, and his deeds of plunder and debauchery had caused great scandal. Leonardo Aretino, who knew this pope intimately, speaks of him as being ' a great man in secular affairs but useless in spiritual matters.' " (Tosti. *Storia del Concilio de Costanza*). His conduct as pope, however, did not verify this dictum ; for, while his pontificate was by no means free from scandals, he showed little capacity in secular diplomacy, but was fairly clear-sighted in ecclesiastical concerns.

own account, announced to the world that a Council would be opened at Constance, towards the end of the year 1414; and invited to it the two papal claimants who had been deposed. To this assembly the Franciscan Order thought it right to submit their intestine disagreements. The General Council began and carried on its proceedings with great pomp and solemnity. Things moved very slowly; princes filed in there with their courts; bishops with their retinues; it was an enormous gathering. Nowhere was there a learned or important body which did not claim representation.—The Duke of Burgundy, Jean sans Peur, insisted that his ambassador should have precedence over those of the imperial Electors, thus coming immediately after the kings. Of the three men by whom the Congress was pioneered and guided, two were French, Pierre d'Ailly and Gerson. Whence it appeared to the reformed Franciscans of France a very suitable occasion for setting forth their rights, claims and grievances. So they duly forwarded to the Council a petition, which was first of all submitted to examination by Pierre d'Ailly and the Italian cardinal, Giordano Orsini.

We shall not attempt in these pages to unravel the rival contentions on points of law and discipline of the friends and adversaries of the Franciscan Reform. We shall content ourselves with stating the two incompatible theories which divided the Order at the time and in some sense have divided it ever since. We already know the views of the Observants and of St. Colette. As these "reformed" brethren were still governed by "conventuals"—to which party the whole Franciscan government then naturally belonged—they were impeded by



these superiors in a thousand ways, and prevented from leading the life of strict observance and especially stern poverty to which they aspired. Not alone were they looked on with suspicion by those in authority—they were actually considered a source of danger. So they were kept in subjection as not only subordinates, but insubordinates ; and, from the Father Guardian to the Father General, every superior brought his quota of hindrances and restrictions to their efforts. What the Reformed now asked for was that their right to live an austere life should be authoritatively recognised and not officially thwarted.

On the other hand, let us see how this period in the history of the Friars Minor is summed up by a Conventual ! Writing in recent times, Palomes, a Franciscan of Sicily, says : “ From this time onwards, instead of the vague complaints and lamentations of the first enthusiasts, now succeeded by the party of fanatics, we become aware of a definite formula, dating from the time that authority became divided. We hear the cry for ‘ reform.’ This catchword was put forward for the purpose of obscuring the real origins of the complete separation which it was ultimately to bring about. . . . It is quite true that to live without owning a settled income was a more excellent example and a higher state of perfection ; but the fact of owning possessions in common did not prevent each individual religious from observing the Rule in all its strictness.” He then describes the hopes entertained by the French Reformers when, fifteen years later, their procurator, William de Casale, was nominated General of the Order. But Palomes forgets that it was not the French alone who were concerned. On account of the fact that the first “ *fraticelli* ” who were driven from Italy

had found a refuge in Provence, the Order has been sometimes inclined to look upon the French brethren as dissentients and disturbers. As a matter of fact, the movement which we call the "Observance" had been founded in Italy itself fifty years previously in the little convent of Brogliano, and had made its way to Hungary in 1380, to Castile in 1390, to Portugal two years later, and to Aquitaine in 1402.

The decision of the Council of Constance, however, concerned itself with the French brethren only, and it was in their favour.

Without abolishing any of the privileges enjoyed by the Conventuals, without interfering with them in any way, the Council granted to the Observants of each French province the right to choose a special Vicar-Provincial. In this way the central government of the Order remained intact, the General being higher in authority than all the Provincials. But from this time forward there were two vicars in every French province, one for the Conventuals and one for the Observants, and every new regulation, every new appointment made by the vicar, made a further shade of difference between the convents. This state of things was emphasised by some changes in dress. That all these differences went deep, much deeper than one might gather from the words of Fra Palomes, is proved by the fact that they continued to give rise to dissensions and difficulties for centuries—in fact, have never ceased to do so. The Colettine reform was never accepted by the Conventuals. A new reform was initiated in 1525, and gave rise to the important Franciscan family known as Capuchins. But Conventuals, strong in central possession of the Order and in the indults whereby various popes

have ratified their interpretation of the Franciscan rule, have continued to hold their position and rights and to render great services to the Church. It is they who watch over the tomb of the holy Founder in the hill-city of Assisi, while the sanctuary of Portiuncula in the plain below is guarded by Observants.

Diversity does not exclude a very real degree of unity. Variations in the Franciscan mode of living have not prevented the Franciscan spirit from living on, though among many and trying vicissitudes, under the various colours given to it by the needs and passions of men. In truth, the fact that this spirit is capable of being interpreted in many various ways without being lost only proves its reality and vitality.

Meantime, we may draw attention to the high tribute paid to the Observants by the Conventual writer whom we have quoted when he says that the ideal they set before themselves was "a more excellent example and a higher state of perfection." It was (as we have said) only to the French Observants that the Council of Constance accorded a modification of the usual hierarchical obedience; but later on Pope Eugene IV. extended this privilege to the Observants of Spain, while the General of the order sent Bernardine of Sienna as vicar to those in Italy.

In recent times it seems to have been fairly well established that the division in the Order was brought about—not by Colette nor by the brethren at Dôle, but by those of Mirabeau in Poitou independently of the others and, in fact, against their will. Colette and the friars at Dôle only asked for one thing—namely, for "visitors" nominated by the Minister-General of the Order, to whom they could confide their grievances. Had this gentler method

of proceeding been followed up, the desirable unity of government in the Order would probably have been safeguarded. In justifying their more drastic proceedings, the friars of Mirabeau made use of the great reputation for sanctity which had been acquired by the Dôle community, but at least Colette was not involved in their action. On the contrary, it distressed her ; for she was deeply imbued with the spirit of her Order and abhorred all breaches in its harmonious working. Her strenuous efforts to heal the schism in the Church may serve as a proof that she would not encourage a schism among her brethren.



While the Council was debating these questions and many others, Colette was founding new communities, and if we call to mind the complications and difficulties arising from the foundation of Auxonne or the reform of Dôle, which were repeated more or less in each new establishment, we shall be able to form some idea of the life of manifold activities and anxieties which she led. About this time the anxieties of the Duchess of Burgundy regarding the doings and schemes of her husband were becoming more and more poignant. It was indeed the darkest epoch of the duke's life—the time when, having conquered Paris, he induced it to rise against its king and himself attacked Charles VI. : when he outlined, with Henry V. of England, plans which aimed at France ; when the precarious peace of Arras was no sooner signed by him than broken ; when, although his two brothers, Antoine of Brabant and Philip of Nevers, laid down their lives at Agincourt along with the flower of the French nobility, he stood aside with folded arms and made his

son do the same. Margaret had retired to Rouvres, where Colette often stayed while on her travels. The duchess, when in distress, used to send for her and unreservedly pour out her sad confidences. Colette encouraged her to fortitude, and to generosity and zeal in the founding of religious houses and other good works. In 1415 Margaret had plans for no less than four Franciscan convents—two for men, which were subsequently built at Seillères and Chariez; and two for women, at Poligny and Seurre.

The story of the Poligny foundation shows clearly the great influence which Colette exercised in the household of the Burgundian princes. In the rough and hardened soul of Jean sans Peur there seems to have been some hidden chord which Colette could set vibrating. Was this because his wife loved her? Or had he some superstitious reverence for the Saint? It is said that during the year 1414 Margaret and her children were in great peril, as the Armagnac party had sent Jean de Chalon against Burgundy and his army was marching against Dijon and Rouvres, neither of which had any defences, while Jean sans Peur was far away—engaged in taking Compiègne and Soissons for the king. The chronicle states that Margaret, in her alarm, had recourse to Colette, and that the Saint—we know not whether by intervening openly in the matter or by her prayers—was able to avert the danger. The army of Jean de Chalon did not carry out the threatened invasion.

Poligny, which of all her foundations, Colette loved best, was her third, Besançon and Auxonne being now filled with her daughters. Poligny lies close to Dôle, in a mountainous recess where the Jura juts out abruptly into

the great plain, all covered with rich harvests. It had strong walls and towers, and seemed to hang on to the steep slope of the hills, rising a sheer hundred yards over the level of the plain. This secluded little town, all surrounded by walls, its low-roofed houses nestling on the side of the mountain, wide near the plain and narrowing as it ascended the hill, reminded one of a triangularly-shaped vine seeking the rays of the setting sun. The town had a certain appearance of wealth ; numerous churches, strong and imposing towers, of all of which only a tower and some beautiful Romanesque arches still remain. Poligny's motto was "*A Dieu playze.*" "May it please God ;" and this device can still be seen on many of its public works. "*A Dieu playze porte*" : "*A Dieu playze cette fontaine*" : "*A Dieu playze—Poligny.*"

Whom did Colette send to inspect the sites of her foundations ? Was it Guillaume de Vienne, who is known to have organised the houses for men at Seillières and at Chariez ? or Henri de la Baume ? or possibly Blanche de Genève ? Blanche had returned about this time to live near Colette, with her niece Mahaut ; and it was her equerry, a gentlemen named Jean Bon, who superintended the building of the convent. In any case, no matter by whom, a place was chosen for the new Franciscan home, close to the mountain, behind the apse of the Church.

The spot was at the time occupied by a ducal storehouse of arms. And when in the month of June 1415, the Duke conveyed its possession to the foundress, the officials who were in charge there protested strongly, declaring that the *depot* could not be replaced elsewhere except at great expense. These remonstrances were



conveyed to Jean de Montigny, the duke's agent for the bailiwick of Aval ; and he made some difficulties about giving possession of the place to Colette.

Jean sans Peur, apprised of the matter, replied by a letter dated from Rouvres, August 6th, 1415.

“ As, at the request of our most cherished and beloved consort, the Duchess, and out of consideration for our cherished and beloved sister Colette Boëllet, abbess of the Franciscan nuns at Auxonne ; We, having by our other letters sealed with our great seal, and for the causes and considerations which are stated in them, given free of all charges to the church and to the said abbess our estate and house situated in the street in the upper part of our town of Poligny, there to found and build a monastery of Franciscan nuns, because from our heart we desire to spread the divine worship and to maintain our gifts and grants, and that the said monastery may be founded and built in the place of our said house and estate, and for several other reasons which have decided us, we will that the said gift and grant made by us to the said religious shall take effect, and we command and enjoin on you expressly that all the obstruction which has been caused by your orders you shall withdraw and remove, and allow the nuns to take possession.”

Thus was the foundation at Poligny settled and secured. The enclosure was small, hanging on to the steep hillside, and seeing little of the sun, except in its upper end, where there was a garden supported on narrow terraces. Colette declared it “ *bien sequestré*.” Doubtless it was for this reason that she selected it. The builders set to work. It is said that at the request of the Duchess of Burgundy the cells were made a little larger than those of the Ave Maria

at Auxonne. When it was finished, she placed five sisters there, one named Chevalier, a native of Poligny itself, also Sister Claude of Arras and a young nun named Claude of Corcey or Courcelle. Colette herself became abbess of Poligny. She lived there for seven years, during which, no doubt, she was frequently absent, made long journeys, even spent considerable periods at Besançon and Auxonne, yet Poligny remained her habitual residence. Clearly she loved this quiet retreat between plain and mountain, sheltered in the clefts of the rocks and the shadows of hills and forests.

The town of Poligny was a place of quiet ; there was nothing of " that great murmuring as of many waters " which one hears in crowded cities ; at the same time there dwelt there many people of wealth, culture and piety, who never allowed the Poor Clares to suffer want.

Colette then secluded herself with her nuns in this monastery, to which she gave a somewhat curious name—Our Lady of Pity. Sylvère says this was because about this time she had suffered a great deal of annoyance over the reform of the Franciscans at Dôle. But we doubt this reason. There were on all sides such widespread evidences of distress and misery as to fully justify Colette in this choice of a name. And as for her being, cast down or overwhelmed by her labours and trials for the glory of God, this would be entirely contrary to our ideas of this saint,—of a character so strong, resilient and alert. On the other hand, it is not improbable that her great affection for the duchess of Burgundy, who had built the convent, may have suggested that it should be placed under the invocation of Our Lady of Pity or of Compassion. Margaret of Burgundy was at the time a

deeply afflicted woman, and we know how compassionate and sympathetic Colette could show herself. At the time that she was founding the convent at Poligny, a young novice whom she had brought with her fell grievously ill, and it soon became evident that she was in danger of death. Now, whenever one of her nuns seemed about to die, Colette invariably stayed beside her, to give her help and consolation. So she placed one of the sisters in charge of this young nun, desiring her to watch vigilantly, and to come and call her if death seemed certain. Unfortunately, whether through fatigue or negligence, the nun in charge fell asleep ; and while she was sleeping the novice died. Colette was deeply distressed, and severely reprimanded the careless nun. Later on she predicted to her that she should die alone. " Because," she said to her, " you did not carry out the directions I gave you, I tell you now that you will die alone ; no one shall be present at your death." And as a matter of fact this nun (Sœur Perrine relates) experienced the truth of her abbess's prophecy. In her last illness she lost her speech for the space of six hours and thought she would never recover it. She had not received the Sacraments, and was much afflicted that she should die thus. Colette came, full of kindness, to visit her and prayed beside and for her. Her speech returned, and she was able to go to Confession. But when she had obtained this relief Colette remained no longer there, no one else came, and the nun's last hours were as lonely as were those of the young novice during whose agony she had slept—how many years previously ?

It was also through compassion and heartfelt gratitude that Colette promised Blanche of Geneva to carry out

her last wishes. This princess requested that, no matter where she should die, her body should be carried to the convent where the Mother happened to be staying. Her death took place during those years when Colette was abbess of Poligny. And she whose bones might have rested among the counts of Geneva or those of Chalons was carried to the humble monastery. The chapel built by Mahaut of Savoy no longer exists, but the remains of this benevolent princess, who had been so great a support to Colette, still rest in the chapel at Poligny.

One inconvenience was much felt at the new monastery. There was no water. The lay-sisters used to go every morning with buckets to bring it from the town. But this was, as Sœur Perrine says, "a great burden and trouble," and Fodéré adds that this work was not got through without many distractions to the carriers and much "chattering by the wayside." Many efforts had been made to sink a well within the precincts of the convent, but the borers had found no water. At last, one Friday in Lent, "the day when the Roman Church makes mention of the Samaritan woman whom Our Lord asked for water, after our said glorious Mother had made her devout and fervent prayers, telling Our Lord piteously about her trouble, she set people to work and bore in a certain place of the said convent-enclosure, and presently the water, in great abundance, and so beautiful and so good that there is none like it in the said town nor in the country, appeared and bubbled up."

There was assuredly nothing languid or doleful about Colette's way of serving God, and it was with a joyful heart that she founded and guided monasteries, even when she gave them touching titles such as "Our Lady of

Pity." "I have never seen or noticed" writes Sœur Perrine, "that she was ever found unwilling when there was good to be done; nor so overcome by trouble that she was not quite ready to continue using all her powers in all things concerning the honour of God and the salvation of souls.

Several times, when she was about to set out in order to go from one convent to the other, for the greater glory of God, she seemed so weak and feeble that she could not support herself, so that it appeared impossible to bring her even a quarter of a league; and nevertheless she would courageously undertake the journey, saying that she was ready to die, if it so pleased Our Lord, in the fields or in the town . . . And when the other sisters were so weak or so overworked that they could do no more, she was still as lighthearted and fervent that it seemed as if she had never been tried."

One of Colette's constant pre-occupations at this time was the schism in the Church. It was ever in her thoughts. And, whether it was merely that she was well informed on the subject and that her natural sagacity enabled her to penetrate the future, or that, as the legends assert, she had frequent supernatural revelations as to the state of the Church, it often happened that for months in advance she would mourn over some new dissensions or irreparable blunders which she perceived were about to intensify the long-drawn-out calamities of the Papacy. More than once her nuns found her in tears and learned from her lips disheartening anticipations. The council of Constance had now lasted for two years and a half without achieving any results. The spring of 1417 had come, and at the great assembly in the distant German town there

seemed to be much talk and little work. When it began, there had been three self-styled occupants of the papal chair ; now, there remained not even one. John XXIII., one morning, had crossed the lake, disguised as a fisherman ; he had been captured, condemned, and put " into a safe and suitable place " under the surveillance of the Emperor of Austria. The Count Palatine Louis of Bavaria, to whom he was given in charge, fulfilled his duties rigorously. Benedict XIII. had returned to his native Spain. He had selected as his residence an impregnable fortress, Perriscola ; and there he lived, defiant, with three cardinals. Gregory XII., the pope at Rome, being the only one now remaining, began by acting as one having authority. The council summoned by Sigismund was a huge miscellaneous gathering including great numbers who had no claim to sit in a council of the Church. Gregory now convoked its members afresh in the name of his authority as Vicar of Christ, and then to this assembly now fully authorised, of cardinals, bishops and other prelates, the princes being recognised merely as witnesses, he solemnly tendered his resignation. The council accepted it. Peter de Luna was declared a heretic and a schismatic and deprived of his usurped powers. But this news did not shake the solitary of Perriscola. He still believed himself pope. Each morning he launched his thunderbolts against a disobedient universe ; sentences of excommunication went to the four quarters of the globe : and, keeping up his resistance to the last, he exacted when he was about to die a promise that he should be buried in full pontifical insignia and that someone should be appointed to succeed him as Pope. So ended the strange life-history of this strange man.



The field now being clear and the Holy See vacant, the assembly at Constance, although always more large than impressive, remained the sole centre of the Church. To it the faithful now turned their eyes with anxious eagerness. "This is a time to watch and not to sleep," as St. Catherine of Sienna had written at the beginning of this same schism.

In truth the saints were keeping watch. Through them a spirit of faith, vivid and forceful, was springing up in the distracted Church. In that tangled wilderness, as it might have seemed, noble men like Bernardine of Sienna and women like Colette or Catherine were as so many sparkling fountains whose waters, ever flinging up their spray to heaven, gave beauty and enduring life to what would else have been sandy or weedy desolation.

One such saint flourished in Spain at this time ; it was Vincent Ferrer, of the Order of Preachers. He had been preaching all his life, he had worked hundreds of miracles ; and now, at the age of seventy, his soul was still burning with apostolic zeal, his sermons full of impetuous fire. He had been confessor to Pedro de Luna for a while, but had left him when Ferdinand, king of Arragon, had withdrawn his support from this claimant to the papacy. Now although far away in Spain, he was anxious to meet Colette, of whom he had heard many marvels, and he had planned to journey through France, preaching as he went, and thus make his way to her neighbourhood.

He set out in the summer of 1416, and during some eight months preached his way through France, evangelising over a dozen cities and large towns ere in mid-spring he reached Auxonne. If we know much about the

movements of St. Vincent Ferrer, it is because he never showed any desire to hide his light under a bushel while on his travels. Some hundred Dominicans accompanied him. He was everywhere surrounded by admirers and adherents, who announced his destinations, and prepared triumphal receptions for him in the towns. People contended for the honour of receiving him. He arrived riding on an ass, a great painted cross in his hand. A platform was made ready, from which by voice, by gestures, by a wonderful gift of eloquence whereby he could thrill vast crowds with every emotion in turn, he preached Christian repentance, the punishment of sin, the last tremendous judgment. And then, in order to add weight to his words, to confirm his conversions, to make his converts believe and follow him, to give glory and honour to God, he worked miracles. In his life these wonders occur pressed together and running over. The sick and the dead are brought to him ; he restores to health and to life. He passes through the peoples like a cleansing fire.

Colette knew of Vincent Ferrer's approach, and she knew that he was coming to see her ; she also knew that he was intensely interested in the healing of the Great Schism, and that he had been invited and urged to go to Constance. Doubtless she rejoiced at his coming. According to the most probable accounts, she was not at Auxonne when he went there ; she was at Notre Dame de Pitié. Vincent Ferrer spent three days at Auxonne in April, 1417 ; then crossed the Jura, going in the direction of Poligny. Hearing of this, Colette went to meet him. Tradition says that they met at Frontenay. The place is still known as Val de St. Vincent, and the

neighbouring spring, where he probably quenched his thirst, also still bears his name.

Vincent remained for a week with the Dominicans of Poligny. Every day he had long conversations with Colette. With reference to the schism, which was probably the principal reason of his coming to France, they decided to send a joint message to the councils, and together they drew it up.

He had decided to send this message to the Fathers at Constance, instead of going there in person, although his presence there had been urged by many notable people : by his own sovereign, the King of Arragon, and after this king's death, by his son Alphonsus V., who wrote to Vincent on the 15th April, 1416 ; also by the Chancellor, Gerson. " O threefold, fourfold happiness," exclaims the latter, " if you could see with your own eyes the election of the Sovereign Pontiff, which cannot be long delayed ! And what a joy for the Council to have you present ! This would be the best way, if I am not greatly mistaken, to ensure the full advantages from the work that you have hitherto accomplished." Vincent Ferrer, in fact, had strongly urged the King of Arragon to withdraw his obedience from Pedro de Luna, and as strongly exhorted Pedro himself to renounce his claims to the papacy.

This letter is dated 9th June, 1417. Long before it arrived, Vincent must have decided not to present himself at the Council, and must have sent on the joint letter from Colette and himself. With regard to this letter, we know neither its date nor its contents. Very probably the Council received innumerable exhortations and propositions of a similar character during the three years of its

existence. That signed by the two saints may well have influenced its proceedings, without the fact being recorded in its archives. Anyhow the Council brought its proceedings to a close during the following November, by the election of the estimable cardinal Otto Colonna, who took as pope the name of Martin V.

Their object being thus achieved, Vincent Ferrer parted from Sister Colette and set off again on his missionary travels. They were destined to see each other again. Vincent came back to Besançon two months later, and on this occasion they spoke only about their souls. Leaving aside the world and its affairs, they gave free rein to the seraphic ardour which was their inner life. Vincent gave his cross to Colette. It was a tall cross made of wood, which is still to be seen in the Poor Clares' monastery at Besançon. People used to call it "*le baton de Maitre Vincent*," and it was, in fact, the only staff he ever used. When he was coming along the road, it was the cross which was seen first. Whenever he was preaching, he fixed the sharpened foot of the cross in the ground beside him. The wood, formerly painted black, is now of various colours, principally green. The figure of Christ, nailed to this rood, is very remarkable. It is of Spanish design, sculptured in hard wood, scarred, furrowed, realistic. Unfathomable suffering is expressed in body as well as countenance. The hair is black, the body reddish, the face a long, slender oval, the features intensely expressive. It seems a wonderful thing to see with our own eyes this crucifix—the very crucifix which the great preacher held up, long ages ago, before the eyes of eager crowds, and with which he used to touch the dead when commanding them to arise to life.

He begged Colette to keep it as a souvenir. Colette then showed him a golden cross ornamented with pearls and enclosing a small relic of the True Cross, which she had received mysteriously during an ecstasy. It was spoken of as "the Cross from Heaven." Her own conviction, and that of others, was that it had been placed in her hands by an angel. Henri de la Baume at one time brought it to Rome. Colette showed this cross to the aged Dominican, and he, once given such a theme, spoke words of such burning fire that Colette straightway fell into an ecstasy. Less than this would indeed have sufficed ; for the least discourse concerning the love of God used to lift her above this world. Vincent Ferrer gazed at her full of admiration, and envying, doubtless, her beatitude. For he himself had had visions, and knew what these celestial hours or moments were like.

They parted. And there is such a human touch about their farewells ! Friendship's most perfect moment is that which brings perfect understanding, and these two friends had come to understand each other with that spiritual insight which is the clearest and deepest of all. Henceforth they could never be really separated—their mutual understanding was complete. But the friar was old, and Colette knew that she would never see him again. So the following conversation took place between them :

Colette asked him if he wished to know what she had learned about him while in ecstasy in his presence. It was that he would die before long, which she considered a great recompense for all his labours. When he asked for more precise information, she replied :

"You will die in less than two years." And Vincent, startled, repeated, "In less than two years !"

Then, with an impassioned gesture, he said : “ Well, tell me at least that it will be in Spain ? ”

But Colette said :

“ No. In France.”

The aged friar bowed his head. It was a hard sentence ! They parted. And St. Vincent Ferrer died at remote Vannes, in Brittany, on the 5th of April, 1419, without having revisited his beloved native land.\*



Colette had met Jean sans Peur at Rouvres, and we know that she had sometimes written to him. More than once she had implored him to give up his life of warfare, and on certain occasions he had listened to her advice. But his inveterate love of fighting, together with the promptings of ambition and the distrust and suspicion often found in those who have greatly injured others, carried him along to new adventures and violences. Never had there been so many partisans on both sides ready to carry on the quarrel between Armagnacs and Burgundy, and Bernard d’Armagnac would have fought Jean single-handed, so much did he abhor the murderer of the Duke of Orleans. Jean took a hand in everything that was going forward. In spite of all, he was much beloved ; it was not easy to hate him. In the course of one day—we do not know the date—St. Colette sent him no fewer than three messengers—Franciscans. Jean was

\* That he was concerned in the affairs of the Council is made evident by a fact related in its annals. Shortly after his parting from Colette (and possibly in consequence of their joint letter) the Fathers sent to him the Cardinal de Sant’ Angelo, two Masters on Theology, and two doctors, to solve a point of doctrine ; and his decision was received with universal satisfaction.



going into battle ; the opposing armies were facing one another, the combat was about to begin. Colette's message made a deep impression on the duke. In a vision the nun had seen the two armies confronting each other, and she knew that if they went into battle, there would be " great slaughter and spilling of blood " on both sides, and many lost souls ; also that the fight would be useless : " Monseigneur le Duc would be defeated." She added to this " letter of exhortation " such words as she thought most likely to touch the heart of Jean sans Peur. The duke, we are told by his biographers, began to waver. Already, perhaps, doubtful as to the result of the conflict, he changed his mind, and the expected encounter did not take place.

Nor did the duke hesitate, when occasion required, to ask for help from this great friend of his duchess. At the time that he was upholding the peace of Arras, being in need of allies, he was anxious for a reconciliation with his brother-in-law, the Duke of Savoy. The contract drawn up between Savoy and Burgundy was sent by him to Rouvres, where the duchess and Colette then were ; we even know that the messenger had to delay for a month before he could reach them, as a pestilence raging at Dijon made quarantine necessary for all who had passed through that town. Colette acted as intermediary and councillor on this occasion.

But neither alliances nor wisdom could hold back Jean sans Peur from the rapid descent which now appeared to be his destiny. In 1418, his soldiers took back Paris from the Armagnacs. They marched into the city, a band of undisciplined plunderers. They massacred ten thousand men, including the Constable, Bernard d'Armagnac, the

Archbishops of Rheims and of Tours, and fifteen other bishops. The slaughtered prisoners were piled in heaps everywhere, the assassins raged around, drunk for blood, and Paris became a city of inexpressible horrors.

Jean sans Peur made a public entry there with the duchess. It is said that he was horrified at what had gone on, that he gave orders that butchery should cease immediately, and caused the brutal Capeluche, who had organised the massacre, to be executed. All the same he did not escape the fierce resentments which followed these deeds.

It was all very well for the wealthy middle classes and business people of Paris, who adored him, to cover his carriage with flowers ; but the bulk of the populace held him in abhorrence. In the following year, scarcely three months before his death, we are told that Colette implored of him to restore peace, predicting that misfortune awaited him if he neglected this warning. But it was too late. The young dauphin, Charles, had already formally pardoned this redoubtable cousin of his ; had indeed, poor boy, sworn at Melun, the previous July, that he and the duke were the best of friends, full of loyal affection for each other ; the duke making a similar declaration. Why, then, was another meeting arranged ? Who was responsible for it, and what pretext was put forward ? We do not know for certain. The duke's mistress, Dame de Giac, treacherously persuaded Jean to consent to the interview, much against his will. On the 10th September, 1419, they arrived at the bridge of Montereau, each followed by an equal number of attendants, and advanced towards one another ; whereupon, at the very moment that the Duke of Burgundy, velvet cap in hand, bent his

knee before the heir of France, he was stabbed in the back. He sprang up, but another blow pierced his bowels. Between the attendants there followed a fierce conflict, during which Tanneguy du Châtel carried away the dauphin in his arms. The dead bodies were left as they fell, and were subsequently robbed. Three weeks later the curé of Montereau exhumed from the cemetery the body of the duke, clothed only in his mud-soaked doublet. The pillagers had also spared his breviary, a beautifully-ornamented book which he always carried with him.\*

When the news of this dreadful tragedy reached Margaret, her anguish was indescribable. Colette, summoned in haste to the unhappy princess, found on arriving at the castle a desolate mourner, whose heart was broken "and whose tears could never be dried."

\* "A very handsome breviary, beautiful and rich, as used in Paris." But he used also to read the *Decameron* and the *Tales of Watriguet* of Couvin.

"This death was the cause of mourning, weeping and crying, so great and so genuine, throughout Burgundy, Flanders, and Artois, that it was a pitiful and sorrowful thing to hear and know of; and especially Madame Margherite de Bavière, his wife, and Monseigneur le Duc Philippe, his only son and heir." There resulted a war of twenty-two years, during which more than a million of men perished. (Olivier de la Marche. *Memoires*.)

#### IV.

### TWENTY YEARS OF INCESSANT TRAVELLING, OF FOUNDATIONS AND REFORMS (1420-1440).

THIS is the period during which Colette's activity and influence reach their highest point. She is now forty years of age. At this time her life becomes one long succession of good works ; enterprises and projects of various kinds engage her ; while notable personages appear on the scene at every turn. The progress of her reform becomes more and more intimately associated with the great factions which divide France ; for by this time she is a celebrity, and great chiefs of the ruling families then fighting are glad to obtain her assistance or to give her theirs. Her work, mainly intended for the poor and humble, relies for support on the mighty. A strange chain of circumstances had made her acquainted with the Duchess of Burgundy, and before long the other great houses of France were anxious for her friendship. It is often of great interest to watch the varied currents which unite to impel an individual or an undertaking towards an destined end. Colette's burthens were becoming heavier and and more numerous. She might easily have involved herself in difficulties, if she had not restricted herself to purely religious activities, or if she

had not possessed that prudence, that wisdom, which refuses to deviate from a prescribed routes. She passed in and out of the various political parties without attaching herself to any ; by none could she be claimed as a partisan. Ever swirling back and forward, the warring factions come into collision or fall apart, without in any way injuring either the foundress or her work. She remains friendly with those who were quarrelling, while keeping entirely outside their quarrels. Whatever her own sentiments may be, she remains, and wishes to remain, a religious, a servant of God's interest, and nothing more. No doubt she had a personal regard for these great princes and princesses so overwhelmed with cares and anxieties ; no doubt also their protection was of enormous assistance to her work as well as a good example to others. In turn she had won over Burgundy and Bourbon, the kingdom of France, and its worst enemies. Best of all, her friends never forsook her. Her capacity for making and keeping friends must have been singular.

Unhappy Marguerite de Bourgogne, bent on the expiation of her husband's crimes, had thrown another convent as an offering into that fathomless gulf. This was the convent of Seurre, in Franche Comté. It was commenced in 1420, inaugurated in 1421, and finished in 1422. A wealthy townsman of Seurre, Jacques Charton, surnamed Jacquot du Bourg, and his wife, Jacquette de Savignon, gave Colette ten thousand livres and a house ; another resident, Guillaume des Estours, gave a second house adjoining the first ; Guillaume de Vienne obtained the remission of all taxes ; Margaret of Burgundy did the rest.

Her contributions were intermingled with those of the

citizens of Seurre, to whom they were a great encouragement ; and on the 20th of October, 1421, she decided that the monastery might be opened. Guillaume de Vienne\* who was then acting as Chief Commissioner of the State during Duke Philip's absence at the wars, came from Dijon to Rouvres to act as her escort ; as did also the Archbishop of Besançon, Thibaut de Rougemont, who was to bless the convent ; and they all went on to Seurre. But it was a mournful procession, without pomp or ceremony. Colette, on her part, was to come to Seurre from Besançon. She set out with the seven nuns whom she intended for the new convent, amongst them being Marie Sénéchal, of Corbie, the friend of her childhood. Père Henri also accompanied her.

On the way she found herself in a difficulty. At a place called Neublans, she stopped at the house of a gentleman named Rollin, wishing to ask him for some oaks out of his forest for the woodwork of the convent. Rollin was not at Neublans ; he was expected there, but did not come. Meanwhile the Duchess of Burgundy, who had already arrived at Seurre, became alarmed at the delay and sent on a messenger to Colette. Colette thereupon decided to start out at once, and to travel by the shortest route. The river Doubs, however, which had to be crossed, was flooded and had overflowed its banks. Colette was strongly advised not to try to cross it, but she was unwilling to delay. Having prayed all through the night, she set out in the morning at the head of her little band, first making the sign of the cross on her face. Although the floods had covered up the ford, or footbridge, which was usually there, she walked towards the river as if she could see the

\* He was the first knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece.



passage, and all her little company, some on foot, some on horseback followed her, and reached the opposite bank without any difficulty.

Some people on horseback who had seen this occurrence, says Sœur Perrine, also wished to cross the river. "They said," she relates, "that if these bigots and hypocrites had got across safely, why should not we get across? and very presumptuously they proceeded into the river, in which they were all drowned."

Colette installed her nuns at Seurre and remained there as superior for some time. Seurre became an excellent monastery, the nuns of which were very frequently chosen by the abbess for new foundations. She left it after some months, but came back at the end of the year 1422. It was probably then that she went to Rouvres for what was to be a last visit to her well-beloved Duchess of Burgundy. Margaret died the following year at Dijon.

Seurre, the fourth convent of the Colettine reform, was for the time being the last Burgundian foundation, and its establishment coincides with that of the first "French" monastery, that of Moulins, which took place in this same year 1422. Between Burgundy and France a state of war then existed. This being so, it is very remarkable to note the facilities given Colette to enable her to travel from one to the other of these enemy provinces. The reigning dukes willingly sign safe-conducts for her with their own hand. Each new foundation is personally supervised by her, and she remains in residence until satisfied that it is imbued with the perfect Franciscan spirit; this, however, does not prevent her watching over the older convents as well. So we find her making repeated sojourns at Seurre, Auxonne, Poligny and Besançon, while founding

in the Bourbon territory her new monasteries, Moulins, Aigueperse, Decize, and Le Puy.\*

It was in 1415, after the defeat at Agincourt had so cruelly humiliated the French nobility, that the Duchess of Bourbon became desirous of having in her dominions "a very devout monastery" to be established by Colette of Corbie. This Duchess of Bourbon, Marie de Berry, was a daughter of the first prince of the blood royal; she was passing through a period of trouble which was to last for a long time. Her husband, John I., Duke of Bourbon, a brave and faithful supporter of the King of France, had been made a prisoner by the English and brought to London. He remained a captive there until his death twenty-nine years later. Of his two sons, the eldest, Charles I., Count of Clermont, was the real head of the state, although his mother, in accordance with the wishes of the captive duke, had been nominated regent. But Charles himself, as well as his brother, had been seized by Jean sans Peur in 1418, and shut up in the Tour du Louvre. Against all these trials and anxieties, Marie de Berry was seeking the Divine protection. In her bitter sorrow she made a promise to build two convents of holy women, and asked for the Pope's authorisation, which was granted in a Bull dated the 12th September, 1420. It is thought that the first stone of the Moulins convent was laid in November of the following year, and that Colette went to

\* "She visited and frequented with equal indifference the different warring districts. When she was present in the territory of one party, the enemy used to request her to report favourably concerning them to the other side. And God knows and understands the desire and affection which she had for the good of each party, and the great prayers and petitions which she offered and caused to be offered in all her convents." (Sylvère d'Abbeville.)

the Bourbon court at Moulins for the first time, at the beginning of the year 1421. We see, therefore, that several years had elapsed before the duchess carried out her intentions. It seems probable that as long as that mortal enemy of the Bourbons, Jean sans Peur, still lived, it was impossible to attempt any negotiations with Margaret of Burgundy concerning Colette. And doubtless Colette herself, in a spirit of loyalty towards her protectress, would not have cared to leave Burgundy and work for the court of Bourbon, unless with Margaret's full consent. The first overtures, which were begun through Philip de Vaudrais, a nobleman of the court of Moulins, must have been made in 1420, the year following the duke's death. Margaret of Burgundy, hitherto so powerful, was now simply a sorrowing widow. All the same, there still existed some awkward sources of dissension between the two princesses. Their two children, Charles de Bourbon and Agnes de Bourgogne, had been affianced, although Agnes was a mere child. This promise of marriage had been part of a bargain. When the unprincipled Jean sans Peur held at his mercy Charles de Clermont, future heir of the duchy, he had released him on the promise that he would serve the cause of Burgundy, a promise which it would appear Clermont really did make ; and at the same time Jean, who coveted the rich domains of Bourbon (Bourbonnais, Auvergne, and Forez), virtually forced him into a marriage with his daughter Agnes. Clermont had thus disowned his real *fiancée*, for he was engaged to Catherine of France, the king's daughter, her whom Isabeau de Bavière afterwards had the audacity to marry to Henry V., King of England.

It is not certain whether a formal ceremony of marriage

took place or not ; in any case, as soon as Jean sans Peur was killed, Agnes de Bourgogne was sent home by Charles, and the marriage was not consummated until the 17th September, 1425.

Notwithstanding these family complications, the two princesses, with de Vaudrais as intermediary, came to an understanding with regard to Colette, who thereupon set out for the Bourbonnais.

The two convents of Moulins and Aigueperse, which were founded in 1422 and 1423 respectively, were not occupied until 1423 and 1425. Various obstructions and lawsuits caused this delay. Every new religious foundation had to face the complaints and grievances of former chaplains, who considered that their usages and privileges were interfered with. At Aigueperse, in Lower Auvergne, a chapter of canons were very much annoyed ; and went so far as to knock down during the night what the workmen had built during the day ; until at last the Count of Clermont himself had to intervene.

Seven nuns had come from Polignac and Besançon for the monastery at Moulins. At Aigueperse, Colette herself remained for a long time. Close by was Montpensier, a strong castle owned by the Duchess of Bourbon, who often stayed there. She, like others, felt the charm of Colette's personality, and sought every opportunity for meeting her. One of her sons bore the name of Montpensier, her son Louis, who in future years was to fight beside Joan of Arc.

While at Montpensier Colette received several visits which were the starting points of various new undertakings. One young girl, only sixteen years of age, came to stay with the Duchess of Bourbon, who was her cousin,

desiring to make the acquaintance of Colette Boillet, "*la Mere Colette*," as she was called ; and to become, if possible, "a saint like her." This Isabeau de Bourbon was a most attractive child, who had been brought up with her two sisters in Provence. Their mother, Beatrice of Navarre, was dead, and the three children lived alone, under the care of two noble ladies. Isabeau made the journey from Provence to Auvergne, and was completely captivated by Colette, by this abbess, tall and pale, so renowned, yet to unassuming and gentle, who went from court to monastery, from convent cell to palace, always calm and self-possessed ; with her woollen cloak, her brown hood, her unshod feet ; quietly withdrawing the moment her work was done, but radiating faith, fervour, and holy confidence when her advice was sought on spiritual matters or when listening to the secrets of a soul. Isabeau, young, devout and innocent, begged "*la Mere Colette*" to receive her as one of her novices. Colette sent a letter by Henri de la Baume to Isabeau's father, Jacques, King of Naples, then residing at Castres, requesting his permission for Isabeau to enter religion. He gave his consent, and she entered the novitiate some time later.

It was about the same time that another princess, Bonne d'Artois, Countess of Nevers and daughter of Philip of Artois, came to confer with Colette about the foundation of a convent in the Nivernais. This princess was a daughter of the Duchess of Bourbon ; and—her husband being a brother of Jean sans Peur—she was sister-in-law to the Duchess of Burgundy. So it seems not unlikely that it was through her in the first instance that Margaret had been asked to "grant" Colette to the Bourbon States. This is all the more probable, since it would

appear that the Countess of Nevers had herself applied to the pope for authority to found a convent before anyone else, for the Bull giving this permission is dated 1419.

This foundation was at Decize, on the Loire. The town belonged to Burgundy, but the people of this part of the Nevernais, following the French Loire, were divided in opinion. Besides, Elizabeth herself was "French" in her sympathies, and her husband, the Count of Nevers, had given his life for the king at the Battle of Agincourt—that famous field where his brother, Jean sans Peur, had failed even to put in an appearance.

So, in due course, Colette crossed the Loire and organised the convent at Decize, which was finished in 1424.

Another would-be foundress came to interview her at Aigueperse; the Viscountess of Polignac, Claudine de Roussillon. Colette went soon afterwards to her castle, for the purpose of making a first inspection of suitable sites, leaving Marie Sénéchal to take her place in the recent foundation of Aigueperse. The convent at Decize had just been completed, and Colette was receiving constant messages from the Duke of Savoy, who considered this a suitable time for founding the monastery which he had long wished to establish at Chambéry. She was accompanied to Polignac by Sœur Perrine, Sœur Marie Chevalier, and the young novice Isabeau de Bourbon. Madame de Polignac offered to give them up the castle itself; but Colette distrusted big mansions, especially those which retained their secular appearance, thus recalling memories and ideals entirely at variance with a life of asceticism. Close to Polignac was the town of Le Puy, and here it was that Colette wished the convent to be built. The matter was decided at once, the site



selected and purchased. But a lawsuit concerning the rights to be attached to the property thus acquired, prevented the building of the convent for several years. Not until 1430 could the work be resumed, and it was not completed until 1432. As soon as Colette became fully aware of the difficulties which were to delay the proceedings at Le Puy, she did not waste any further time there. Having engaged lawyers to look after her interests, she left Le Puy, and immediately busied herself with those plans for a convent at Savoy, which she had previously put off on account of Polignac.

She went to Chambéry, with the three nuns who had accompanied her to Auvergne. We do not now what route she selected, but considering how few roads there were to select from at the time, it seems most probable that she went to Savoy through Lyons. There she may possibly have met Gerson, with whom she had exchanged numbers of letters on those matters which interested them both so keenly—the schism, the disunion in the Church, the covetous designs of Burgundy and England, the dissensions in France.\* Then the saintly nun continued her journey ; ever peaceful, ever bringing peace to others, she seemed to radiate peace while the whole world was at war. Nothing stops her, nothing can terrify her.

At Chambéry, the Duke of Savoy has a disappointment to announce. The town was not yet ready for her innovations. The Franciscan monastery, whose reform was attempted some years later, the same convent from which Père Henri had originally come, was entirely opposed to any change of rule. We know that Colette, when establishing her nuns in any new locality always arranged to

\* Gerson died at Lyons, in the convent of the Celestines, in 1429.

have two fervent Franciscan fathers as their directors. Now the friars of Chambéry had not the slightest desire to see in their town these super-devotees, these too zealous penitents. They rose up in revolt. The community of Urbanist Franciscan nuns did the same. All refused to entertain the idea of new rules or changes of any sort. Colette predicted that this state of things would not last always, and her words were verified after her death in 1454. Pointing to Sœur Marie Chevalier, who was with her, she said to the duke : " There stands the first abbess of my reform at Chambéry." Afterwards she continued her journey, having agreed to Duke Amedée's suggestion that she should found a convent at Vevey. As they were travelling along, Isabeau de Bourbon expressed her admiration of the situation of Geneva, through which they were then passing, and Colette predicted that a convent would be established there, but that it would not exist for long, and would be subjected to great trials. As a matter of fact, the Protestant Reformation brought terrible trials on the convent of Vevey, and, of course, destroyed that of Geneva.

Vevey, situated on the shore of Lake Lemman, received Colette's visit with the greatest joy. On arriving there, she performed one of her most touching miracles.

Some Dominican nuns, whose convent was close to Vevey, went out into the " open fields " to await her arrival. Their Order is, of course, twin sister of the Franciscan Order, and the meeting between the daughters of St. Francis and those of St. Dominic recalls the famous meeting between the two saints themselves. And Colette made her own resemblance to her great model appear more striking still. As the nuns came forward one by

one, she held out her arms and embraced them. But one of them held back. She suffered from leprosy (called "*méselerie*" in the old chronicle). The poor girl lived in the convent, separated from the others ; and now, she looked from some distance, not daring to come nearer. Colette, noticing this, said : " Shall I not kiss her also ? " The chaplain of the Dominican nuns then directed the sufferer to come forward. Colette saw at once the reason for the poor girl's reluctance, and said to her, " No matter ; come." The leper came and Colette kissed her on the face, more lingeringly than any of the others, as if with special pleasure.

As a result of this kiss of charity, the nun was immediately cured.\*

As soon as the convent of Vevey was established, several young girls presented themselves there. Among others, Agnes Wisemelle, niece of the Queen of France, Isabeau of Bavaria, was received by Colette. This girl was somewhat vain of her noble birth ; and later on, when one day the name of Isabeau was mentioned in the refectory, she could not help saying to her neighbours : " She is my aunt." Colette rebuked her severely, for she could not bear this kind of foolish pride. The other names which have come down to us of the earliest nuns of this convent, or the most celebrated are Blanche de Savoie, Jeanne de Chalon, Philiberte d'Arnex, Claudine de Pierrefleur† and Loyse de Savoie, daughter of Aimé

\* Sœur Perrine, page 49 : " I, Perrine de Bascue, was in her company, and also the good father, Frère Henri."

† A descendant of this family, the " banneret " of Pierrefleur, wrote a book on the persecutions suffered by the monastery of Vevey during the Reformation. (Lausanne, 1856.)

de Savoie-Achaïe.\* The other princess of Savoy just mentioned, Blanche, is probably a daughter of Duke Amadeus of Savoy—him who had brought Colette to Vevey. For some years previously this duke, now a widower, and known simply as "*le seigneur de Ripaille*," had been leading a life of retirement, the life almost of a monk, in company with a few noblemen.†

Colette had known him for the past twenty years. He installed himself at Vevey, frequently going to see her and keeping a protector's eye on her convent, which was on the opposite shore of the lake.

Later on, when the Council of Bâle suggested that he should accept the papal crown, Colette received the news with pain and amazement. Twelve Fathers of the Council came to Thonon to make this proposal to him. At first he gave a definite refusal, but the emissaries urged him so strongly that he began to hesitate. Colette even then did not dare to reveal her apprehension to her powerful friend and protector, who had not consulted her in any way. But she was in great distress of mind. She felt very strongly that Amadeus should not accept the offer, that he could only be an anti-pope, that the Council of Bâle had no power to elect him. But she could not bring herself to say all this to the duke, fearing to hurt him. Her conscience, however, gave her no rest. At Mass she did not dare to go to Communion, feeling that she was

\* She was aunt of Blessed Loyse, who was a Poor Clare in the monastery of Orbe, where she died in 1503.

† The charming castle of Ripaille is close to Thonon. Amadeus VIII. had retired there with seven "*chevaliers*" chosen from among the noblemen of Savoy. He was not a priest, neither was any of his companions.

neglecting an urgent duty. She confided her misgivings to Pierre de Vaux and to Henri de la Baume : both of them tell her that it is her duty to intervene in the matter, and both immediately set off for Ripaille, for the purpose of requesting the duke to grant an audience to Colette. The situation distressed her very much. " I am only a poor ignorant creature," she protested, " quite unable to speak to this great nobleman." But once she put her hand to the work she recovered her equanimity, and spoke earnestly and long to the duke, saying exactly what her own views and judgment suggested, and begging of him not to accept this misguided offer of the Council. For the time being Amadeus was impressed by her wise advice, but a little later he accepted the papacy. He was one of the wisest men of his age ; he had acquired great renown as a peacemaker, and had often acted as arbitrator between princes. Doubtless he believed that by accepting the offer he would be able to do good and not harm. He was ordained priest forthwith and received the tiara, though, as it turned out, he wore it only for a very short time.\* All this took place in 1438. When Colette heard of it she said to her nuns : " At this hour the anti-pope has given his consent, to the prejudice of our mother the Holy Church." And she herself went to Vevey and Orbe to tell the sisters that they were not to obey him nor to accept any favour from him. But in alluding to these events we are anticipating our narrative by more than ten years.

Among those who offered themselves to Colette during the early days of the Vevey foundation was a young widow, Guillemette de Gruyère, Countess of Valentinois. It is said that the saint kept her on probation for a long time

\* He took the name of Felix V. The true pope was Eugene IV.

before admitting her into the Order. We know already that she did not care for widows. Guillemette was not received into religion until several years afterwards, at Besançon, where she became a most exemplary nun, very humble, very mortified, and "in clothing and sandals even poorer than any of the others." She lived only a very short time after her entrance into religion. While waiting for permission to join the Order, she assisted in the establishment of the convent at Vevey.

Jacques, King of Naples, who after a series of misfortunes\* had retired to Castres, came to Vevey to see his daughter Isabeau. There he saw Colette for the first time, and this meeting laid the foundations of her influence with the monarch, destined later on to bring about his remarkable conversion. He remained for a long time at Vevey, to which place he had brought his third daughter, Marie de Bourbon, and his natural son, Claude d'Aix. Marie followed the example of Isabeau and joined the Poor Clares. Their other sister, Eleanor, was married to Bernard d'Armagnac, son of the Connétable.

Before long Colette was called away to Orbe. Jacques de Bourbon left Vevey at the same time as she did, returning to Languedoc. The Abbess had sent to Franche Comté for Sister Claire Labeur, of Seillières, whom she put at the head of the community.

As to Orbe, Colette had been invited there by Jeanne de Montfaucon-Montbeliard, wife of Louis de Chalon, Prince of Orange, who was now awaiting her at her castle of Nozeroy. The Papal Bull authorising the foundation of Orbe is dated the 17th November, 1426, and the building was finished in 1428. But Colette did not wait for

\* An account of these will be given in the next chapter.



its completion, for in 1428 she was in Languedoc, where at the request of King Jacques, she laid the foundations of three convents ; at Castres, the residence of the king and his daughters ; at Lezignan ; and finally at Béziers, where she accomplished the reform of a convent of Urbanist nuns. The first abbess of Orbe was Mahaut de la Balme.

It was at Orbe that Blessed Loyse of Savoy became a nun in later years. Two daughters of the foundress of Orbe, Philippine de Chalon and one of her sisters, became novices there.

So in 1428 we find Colette at Castres. The bishop, Raymon d'Avilhun, comes to see her and displays great piety as well as profound respect for Colette. Her prayers and good wishes he begs for, in connection with a very important journey to Rome which he is about to undertake. The saint looks at him steadily. This important journey, she understands, has for its object the obtaining of a cardinal's hat by means of influence which the bishop hopes to bring to bear on the pope. With her marvellous insight into the ills of soul and body, she divines that this seeker of honours will not live very long ; and she says to him : " It would be better for you to be thinking of the journey to eternity, which will not be long delayed." The prelate treated her words lightly, not wishing to take them at their proper valuation. He went to Rome, and died shortly afterwards.

Not many details are available concerning Colette's foundations in Provence ; the monasteries of Languedoc, with all their archives, were destroyed by the Huguenots in the sixteenth century. We know, however, that it was at Lézignan she obtained the cure of her dear friend

Père Henri, who was dangerously ill. Then she went back to Bourbonnais and was at Moulins during the autumn of 1429.

Now this same year, 1429, is the most noteworthy year of that century, the year of Joan of Arc.



Whether Colette and Joan of Arc ever met remains an unsolved enigma. Historians who are interested in either of these remarkable women nearly always mention the other as well. They were contemporaries, equally celebrated, and one feels that there is a spiritual link between their lives, that some mystical relationship must have united their missions; but did they actually meet? Did they ever converse together, pray together, exchange thoughts and feelings in actual fact, by word and by look? Charles Péguy, who, although not a historian, has such a keen instinct concerning everything relating to France that he seems a sort of wizard, does not doubt that these two saints were acquainted; he often makes Joan of Arc speak to Colette, and in his book, *Mystère de la Charité*, she exclaims, "To have given up, to have given up—that is worst of all! Madame Colette would never have given up!" And this poetical psychology shows a knowledge of Colette's persevering soul as profound as could result from long study of it. Siméon Luce, a true historian, searched long among the records of all who were in any way connected with Joan of Arc—those who gave her any assistance, those who made it possible for her to accomplish her mission; and coming across the name of St. Colette, he dwells with interest on this problematical meeting with Joan of Arc, hoping that it may have taken place, and wishing that we could know some details con-

cerning it. M. Gabriel Hanotaux, in his historical sketch of the life of Joan of Arc, depicts her as surrounded by the great mystics of her century, Catherine of Sienna, Bridget, Princess of Sweden, and Colette of Corbie, all three of whom had a widespread influence in the world of their day, and who passed through the world not alone as saints, but as missionaries to all Christianity. Colette is the only one of these whom Joan of Arc could have met. But did she? It most unfortunately happens that the end of the year 1429, the time during which this meeting could have taken place, is that period in Joan's short life concerning which documentary evidence is most meagre, and where her "*Itinéraires*" are, in matters of detail, frequently at fault. Then the archives of the town of Moulins which might have contained some references to her stay there were partly burned during the Revolution. As a matter of fact, there are no documents in existence at the present moment where their names occur side by side in the same time or at the same date. On the other hand, there are various indications as to their comings and goings, and some well-ascertained coincidences, which make their meeting almost a certainty.

In 1429, Joan of Arc reached the highest point of her career, and at the time when she was in the vicinity of Colette she had already to her credit the taking of Orleans and the consecration of the king at Rheims; that is to say, she had gained all the glory she was ever to acquire, and, all over France, her name was on everyone's lips. Colette was then forty-eight years old; she was the centre point of innumerable works and enterprises; the country was ringing with the news of the miracles she had accomplished; people came crowding round her when she

arrived in a town. Seven years previously she had founded at Moulins a monastery of reformed Poor Clares, under the auspices of Marie, Duchess of Bourbon, who at the time of the foundation was living at her castle there and was assisted in her good works by her two sons. Now, this same Duchess of Bourbon always treated Joan of Arc as a daughter. Her youngest son, Louis de Montpensier, was at this time in the army of the Maid of Orleans; as for the elder, Clermont, his conduct towards Joan is more equivocal; sometimes he takes her side, sometimes he keeps away from her and listens to all the court intrigues, but whether for or against her interests, he is constantly coming across her path, and Joan is loyal to him, as she always is towards those who are "for the king." During the recent glorious day at Rheims, Sunday, the 17th July, the Count of Clermont, future Duke of Bourbon, held a place of honour in the first ranks of the knights, side by side with Joan of Arc and her standard.

The people of Moulins were intensely devoted to the king. Four years previously, during one of those periods of distress through which the royal house of France passed, five hundred noblemen and knights met at Moulins, and offered to the king, then residing precariously at Bourges, their swords and their lives.

Some time during the year 1429, Colette came to Moulins to visit her convent, and remained there until the winter. We know of her coming by two circumstances; that she had just been visiting her convents in Languedoc, Castres, and Beziers; and that when she arrived in Nivernais towards the month of December she came from Bourbonnais. This information is taken

from the oldest and most correct biography of the saint.\*

During this same autumn, Joan of Arc arrived in Bourbonnais. A royal council, at which it was decided to besiege the places on the Loire then occupied by the Burgundians, had been held at Mehun-sur-Yèvre at the end of September. As a result of this council, Joan began a siege before Saint-Pierre-le-Moutier, a fortified village eight leagues from Moulins, and took it at the end of October. She should next have besieged La Charité-sur-Loire, but she was short of all requirements, and it was then that she went to stay at Moulins, whence she wrote most pressing letters to the inhabitants of Clermont in Auvergne, of Riom, of Bourges and of Orleans, to beg them to supply her immediately with arms and munitions; "powder, saltpetre, arrows and other war materials." The reply from one of these towns, Clermont, came to her at Moulins. The letter to the people of Riom, accompanied by a petition from her equerry, d'Albret, is of special value, for its seal is marked with the print of a finger and of a hair caught in the wax.† This letter is dated the 9th November, and the reply from Clermont arrived on the 7th.‡ So that Joan of Arc must have been at Moulins since the 5th at least: and as there is no report of her presence among the men-at-arms at La Charité until the 24th, and as,

\* Sylvère d'Abbeville. *Chronologie de la Vie de Sainte Colette*. See farther on the actual quotation.

† The library of Riom. This hair must have been stolen in 1888. With reference to this seal, see the "*Procès de Réhabilitation*," by Quicherat, and *La Chevauchée de Jeanne d'Arc en Bourbonnais*, by M. l'Abbé Clément (notes on page 60).

‡ Municipal archives of Clermont-Ferrand.

moreover, it was necessary to wait for the war materials for which she had asked, it follows that she remained at Moulins during the greater part of three weeks—eighteen or nineteen days. The siege of La Charité-sur-Loire was not destined to be a success. Begun on the 15th November, it had to be raised on the 15th December. The town was well provisioned and well defended. Later on—and Joan seems to have advocated this course from the beginning—the king simply bought out the town, which surrendered voluntarily on the 11th of January. Its defender, Bernard Grasser, had received from Bourges 1,300 crowns of gold.\*

At this time the town of Moulins had deep trenches on every side, and was also surrounded by turretted ramparts. The huge ducal castle, perched on the precipitous slope towards the north, occupied almost that whole side. Below it, about half a league away, flowed the broad and sparkling Allier. Jeanne travelled with her company from Saint-Pierre-le-Moutier along the right bank of the river ; perhaps she did not feel quite safe there, for when returning she took the left bank. She made a formal entry into Moulins, with great military display ; “ completely armed,” says the Franciscan chronicle, “ with a suit of armour and with standard flying,” at the head of her men-at-arms and her captains.

Joan at this time was seventeen and a-half years old, having been born in January, 1412. She was tall and robust, a picture of health, strongly built, quite at her ease on horseback, simple and unaffected in her manner. She was very beautiful. Under her helmet shone a face all radiant animation, “ *un riant visage*,” oval in shape,

\* Vallet de Viriville, *Histoire de Jeanne d'Arc*, Vol. ii., p. 126.



with beautiful eyebrows and regular features. It is nearly certain that she was a brunette, or at least of that dark chestnut colouring which is not uncommon in Neuf-chateau, the district from which she came. She wore armour like a man, her chest and the upper part of her arms covered with a "*huque*" or cape, usually red. When she took off her armour she wore the dress of a knight, "a doublet with well-fitting breeches, high boots laced on the outside, a cap on her short hair," her sword at her side.\* It is believed that while at Moulins she stayed at the house of a well-to-do citizen named Charlot Cordier.† Such a choice of residence would have been entirely in keeping with her character and habits, for she always selected a dwelling apart from her companions-at-arms; and, to safeguard her reputation it was her practice when staying with a respectable family, to ask permission to occupy the same room as her hostess.‡

During the two and a-half weeks that she spent at Moulins, she was preparing for her expedition and busying herself with its concerns; but at the same time, and with even more earnestness, she gave her mind to serious meditation and tried to acquire new strength in this quiet refuge. She visited the churches and other places of devotion. In the town of Moulins tradition still tells of the long hours which she spent in the chapel of the Poor Clares beside the great tower of La Geôle. This little chapel, so devotional in its ascetic poverty, still exists, exactly as Joan of Arc and Colette knew it; with its

\* *Chronique des Cordeliers.*

† A. Clement. *La Chevauchée de Jeanne d'Arc en Bourbonnais.* Moulins, 1909.

‡ Quicherat. *Le Procès de Réhabilitation.*

plainly-moulded arches, its bare walls, its small windows, its vaulted ceiling panelled with wood, like the inverted hull of a ship. Tranquil simplicity is its keynote. Joan of Arc, we are told, prayed constantly there. Now this chapel was part of the convent; and the abbess of this convent and this chapel was staying there at the time, and this abbess was Colette herself. How can we suppose or imagine that they did not meet during those days?

We may even venture to think that these interviews might have been more useful by being kept secret. Colette was a patriotic Frenchwoman, who never would consent to build a convent in a place occupied by the English. But the privileged position which she held at the courts both of Bourbon and of Burgundy put her in a quite exceptional situation, where many opportunities of doing good might come in her way, always with the condition that where politics intervened her work should be done in secret. This was an especially difficult time for Joan. Her thirst for action, her impatience to free the kingdom, were often thwarted by the king himself and by the court favourites jealous of her influence; as well as by the Truce of Burgundy, which for the moment served to protect a part of the enemy country. There were just a few small places on the Loire, not included in the Truce, where she could carry on the war; and to these she had been sent, rather than have her remain near the king and regain her influence over him; but she had been sent without proper support or munitions. It may even be true that the money of La Trémouille or his like helped to back up the resistance of Bernard Grasser at La Charité. In all centuries there are people to be found

covetous and ambitious, who prefer the failure of an individual to the success of a cause.



About the same time that Joan quitted Moulins to besiege La Charité, Colette departed for Decize. Both towns are on the Loire, with Nevers between them, each being about the same distance from that city. While Colette was at Decize, a messenger is known to have left that town for La Charité, to make inquiries about the Maid of Orleans and her army. It is quite probable that this messenger was sent by Colette. Who else, in this Burgundian town, would have been sufficiently independent, sufficiently detached from the contending parties, thus to take an interest in the enemy of Burgundy? If our suggestion is correct we are justified in concluding not alone that Colette had met Joan, but also that she must have had a maternal tenderness for the young girl, whose difficulties she so well understood; and that she was very anxious about her.

On account of these circumstances, and by reason of the fact that she had just come from Moulins, Colette fell under grave suspicion in the town. What matter that she was shut up with her nuns in her convent? Had she not just come from the enemy's territory, from the very place whence Joan had set out for La Charité? The whole town is annoyed and distrustful.\* One of St.

\* "Joan the Maid came to besiege La Charité for a whole month, and so the country was full of armies, of tears, and of terror (*d'armées, d'alarmes, et de larmes*). And nevertheless, Sœur Colette did not hesitate to come to Decize, in the midst of all these widespread misfortunes, so as not to be negligent in her duties; and she found the inhabitants of this place keeping guard, and also guarded and burthened with a great number of men-at-arms. During the dark-

Colette's biographers, Perrine de la Baume, intending merely to recount one of the saint's miracles, gives us some interesting sidelights on this point. Every night one of the soldiers used to keep watch on the battlements. They were distrustful of everything and everyone, inside and outside the town. Now it happened that one night the lay-sister charged with the duty of ringing the bell for Matins (which are sung an hour after midnight) made a mistake of three hours and rang the bell at ten o'clock that evening. Immediately there was a terrible commotion among the men-at-arms—in every war, bells have been used as a signal. "We are betrayed!" they cry; "this bell is rung to give warning to our enemies." The soldiers rushed in a fury towards the convent, determined to seize these Poor Clares and make them expiate their treachery. Just then the clock of the town belfry struck one! What had happened? Had Colette been able to send word to some faithful friend who, recognising the danger which threatened them, had caused the clock to be put forward? At all events, the soldiers began to say to each other: "These nuns did not mislead us, it appears; they only rang the bell for Matins at the usual hour." And they proceeded to the convent to apologise to the nuns, expressing regret for their unjust suspicions. The miracle went farther still. The day appeared sooner than usual, in unison with the clocks; a soft brightness, seen in the country all around, enveloped Decize, and

ness of the night everything creates uneasiness. It is always so in war, particularly in civil war, in which the least thing gives rise to suspicion. I have said that Sœur Colette had come from Bourbonnais, the Duke of Bourbonnais being one of the Dauphin's supporters." (Sylvère d'Abbeville.)

the dawn continued indefinitely out of the winter's night.

After the siege of La Charité had been raised, Jeanne stayed for a while at Bourges and at Sully-sur-Loire. Until the departure for Compiègne (May, 1430) she remained near the king. The end of the year 1429 and the beginning of 1430 is the period of her life concerning which we have fewest details ; but during this time she was relatively unoccupied.

Colette remained for a long time in the same neighbourhood. She was at Le Puy at the beginning of 1430 because it was only then she could begin the convent there, and she always made it her business to be present at the earlier stages of a building. And besides, was it not she who, with the assistance of the Duchess of Bourbon and her son Clermont, had obtained from Moulins the desired conclusion of the tedious five-years lawsuit concerning this convent ?



It is quite evident, therefore, that various coincidences of time and place were favourable to a meeting between Joan of Arc and Colette of Corbie. During the greater part of three weeks, circumstances brought them to the same town, and during several succeeding months they were never more than ten leagues apart.

And, judging from what we know of the lives and characters of both, and seeing how easily they could have arranged to meet, it appears more than probable that not only one but several meetings took place between them, with the result, not of a slight or passing acquaintance, but of a firm friendship.

There is even a tradition, discovered by M. Pidoux which asserts that Joan of Arc came to spend three days

with St. Colette, in the convent at Moulins—three days of conversation, of meditation and prayers together. And it is thus one likes best to picture the meeting of these two remarkable women ; three days spent together, long hours of companionship, long talks and long silences, an eager interchange of ideas, with many thoughts in common. Joan was very young, full of impetuous activity, a warrior before all, ever up and doing, her heart set on one aim from which nothing could deflect her, and to attain which she was prepared to stir up anyone and everyone, even the King himself, if necessary ! but in the depths of her soul there dwelt a single-minded piety, a transparent purity, an utterly upright intention.

Colette at this time might almost be described as old ; for years she had laboured patiently and humbly at a task wholly spiritual in its objects, and her life was one of silent mortification ; nevertheless, throughout her long career, she showed the same ardour, the same unquenchable eagerness, as did Joan of Arc ; as well as the same good sense, the same clear sighted and fearless recognition of the evils of the time and their needed remedies.

It seems indeed incredible that Joan, who was always and everywhere asking for prayers, should not have sought those of this holy foundress and reformer, whose name, whose sanctity, whose miracles, were spoken of from end to end of France ; and whose renown, even if it had not reached Joan's ears through popular report, or through the princes with whom both were acquainted, would most certainly have been carried to her by their friends, the Franciscans. Whether Joan of Arc was a tertiary of St. Francis is not certain ; even if she were, that would not imply a great deal, as at that time the



Third Order was so well known that almost every devout woman belonged to it. But, from the fact before us, there is no doubt whatever that the Franciscans, the disciples of Assisi's apostle, were very dear to the Maid.

No doubt, we might search more and more deeply for traces of the mystic bonds which united these two remarkable woman. We might follow up more closely the numerous friendships which they had in common; or we might seek, in the crowd pressing around the sanctuary of the Black Virgin of Puy on March 25th, 1429, for Isabelle Romée, there praying for her daughter Jeanne; and also for Colette of Corbie. In France, bowed down with oppression and anguish, this particular 25th of March, when Good Friday fell on the Feast of the Annunciation, had long been anticipated as a great solemnity, a sign from heaven, giving hope of some wonder by which the country should be saved. Colette was at the time building her convent in this town, the centre of one of France's favourite devotions during the Middle Ages; the other was that of St. Michel-de-la-Mer. And while Colette is founding a convent beside the Black Virgin of Le Puy, Joan chooses St. Michael as her patron and guide.

But here we lose ourselves in mystic conjectures, in those mysteries which surround every human destiny. It may suffice us to remember, that, judging from well-authenticated facts, from comparisons of dates and places, from quite reasonable inferences, Colette and Joan of Arc might easily have met. Therefore we may confidently believe that they did meet, that Joan actually saw the saintly nun, consulted her wisdom, experienced the charm of her presence, confided to her sympathy her innermost thoughts and feelings. And Colette saw this radiant

Maid ; her searching glance penetrated into the depths of this heart, so strong, so upright ; she saw its transparent candour ; and she who so loved purity and courage, must have been enraptured with the beauty of this soul. If, as has sometimes been suggested, Colette found opportunities of serving Joan indirectly, doubtless she willingly availed herself of them ; and it is more than likely that such opportunities arose. This prudent and sagacious woman, who never lost touch with her friends, no matter what differences existed between those friends ; who acted as intermediary and peacemaker between the two great rival houses on whom the fate of France depended ; who had been given safe-conducts for herself and her companions by dukes of Burgundy and dukes of Bourbon and had herself the right to sign them ; who disposed in noble mansions of powers second only to those of princes ;—this remarkable woman could certainly at one time or another have been of use to the Maid who was fighting against Burgundy out of love for France. A great deal has been said, probably with much exaggeration of the truth, concerning a “ Franciscan freemasonry ” which was endeavouring to undermine opposition in the English army and to win over some of the Burgundian leaders ; even the sacred motto “ Jhesus-Maria ” on Joan’s banner has been construed into a secret sign or password : but all this remains merely conjecture. On the other hand, it often happens, that without overt compact or understanding there may be weighty personal influences at work or a secret interchange of ideas. And in this instance it is more than probable that such was the case. France was rent asunder ; its royal mantle was in shreds and tatters ; only thereon the faded outlines of its

golden fleur-de-lys. Across the dismembered kingdom English and Burgundian had left their mark. To this mantle came Joan of Arc the wonder worker ; hither and thither she moved, her path outlined in threads of shining splendour. But beneath this glittering embroidery, patient hands were weaving a background,—the hands of the men and women of France, of soldiers and of monks. Amongst these workers were some few who were able when the right moment came, to join these fragments together and make of them a united whole. And Colette was one of these.

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Both in social and political matters Colette's rôle was essentially that of a mediatrix. Is not this conveyed in every page of her life, spent as it was journeying from place to place, in her foundations in two warring countries with equal confidence and an equally assured position in both ? We can easily understand her work as intermediary, as we come to see more and more clearly what a longing for peace possessed her, or, to speak more exactly, a longing for unity. In such times everyone must have been sighing for peace. Not a single corner of the country could feel secure against all the evils of war—against invasion by military forces or by those roving bands of pillagers, who, owing to the universal war and the absence of civil guards or police of any kind, were free to do as they pleased. Colette, clear-sighted and single-minded, sought the one certain remedy for all these evils ; and that was a union between the princes.

Charles de Clermont had exerted himself to bring about an understanding between Burgundy and France, and Colette's constant endeavour was to draw Burgundy

and Bourbon more closely together. She worked hard towards this end. We do not believe that she was ever a "politician," if by that term is understood someone well versed in public affairs and able to handle them adroitly. Rather do we see in her a wise and conciliatory counsellor, gaining influence over people through the upright and noble side of their characters, while her persuasions based on religion, always tended towards forgiveness and friendly compromises.

All during the lifetime of Duke Philip of Burgundy sensible people were trying to turn him away from warfare. His uncle the duke of Savoy and the Sovereign Pontiff Martin V. both used their influence towards this end. The whole of the country was for several years in his hands, not less, and perhaps even more completely than it had been in those of his father, John the Fearless. What sort of a man was this prince? First and above all things, he was extremely vainglorious. He delighted in magnificence and pomp, in high dignities and prominent positions, in precedences, honours and wealth. While, doubtless, less brutal than his father, he was equally covetous, and he lacked firmness of character. In his alliance with the English his attitude was almost servile. His outlook was restricted, his designs never projected themselves far into the future as did those of his predecessor and his successor, John the Fearless and Charles the Bold; he was more impulsive, and trusted more to chance. On the other hand, his plans for a short time ahead were usually sound and practical.

When it was suggested that the two warring families of Burgundy and Bourbon should become allied by marriage, Colette took a share in the tedious and difficult negotiations

which followed. When important points were being decided, she was at hand ; and she was the intimate friend of those most concerned, including the princesses whose marriages were being discussed.

That of the Count of Clermont with the charming Agnes of Burgundy—thoughtful and learned beyond most of the princesses of her time, was made a question of barter and bargaining for several years. The Comte de Clermont was unquestionably very anxious for this marriage, and Duke Philip, recently become ruler of Burgundy, alternately promised his sister's hand or withheld it according to the condition of public affairs, while constantly reiterating his promises to the Bourbon family. Disappointments and difficulties innumerable had to be surmounted before the marriage took place. In 1423, when an Englishman asked the duke for one of his sisters in marriage, Philip replied to his request in a letter which certainly lacks neither willingness nor cynicism. "I shall be very pleased ;" he said. "I have three of them to get married, and as for two of these you are welcome to whichever you choose ; but with regard to Mme. de Guyenne, formerly the wife of the Dauphin Louis, I cannot answer for her ; you must get her own consent. As for Mme. Anne or Mme. Agnes, that will be all right ; and even though the latter is promised to M. de Clermont, under a penalty of a hundred thousand crowns, that need not be any obstacle." Apparently the duke was quite willing to forfeit his hundred thousand crowns in order to give his sister to an Englishman. This same Englishman married Mme. de Guyenne ; and Anne afterwards married another—the duke of Bedford.

The long delayed marriage of Agnes would perhaps

never have come about if the duke of Burgundy himself had not contracted an alliance with the house of Bourbon. In November 1424 he married the young widow of his uncle, the Comte de Nevers,—the pious Bonne d'Artois whom we have already seen occupying herself with good works after the death of her husband at Agincourt; helping Colette to found convents in le Nivernais, inducing her to come to the Loire and making her acquainted with her mother, the duchess of Bourbon. Bonne d'Artois was a child of the duchess's second marriage; she was related to the royal house of France through her father Philip d'Artois and also through her maternal grandfather, the Duc de Berry. During the autumn which followed this marriage, Agnes of Burgundy was at last married to Charles of Clermont.

The marriage of the duke of Burgundy with the Countess of Nevers did not indeed fully win him over as an ally to France. Considering, however, that it finally dispelled the idea of his alliance with the royal family of England, it must be regarded as an event of primary importance, an unlooked-for turn in the ventures of those who were working for unity and peace. The fact that the future duke of Bourbon shortly afterwards married the sister of the Burgundian prince brought feminine influences still more strongly in evidence all around him. Thence-forward there was formed round the head of the house of Burgundy, an alliance of "hearts altogether French," as Barante expresses it, who sought to turn to advantage even the smallest chances of peace in the midst of these incessant conflicts. In the midst of turmoil and intrigue Colette continued to use wisely her singular influence: her part (we have good reason



to know) was invariably to advise, to foresee, to forewarn, and to soothe.



It was at Le Puy that we last saw Colette,—in 1430 and 1431, when she was able to achieve the foundation of her convent there. In this good work the King of France, Charles VII., participated by the gift of a hundred and twenty ducats of gold. In 1433 we find her at Béziers, reforming the convent of Urbanist Poor Clares. While at Béziers, she learns of the death of Pope Martin V., and foresees the new difficulties in which this event will involve the Church, which had even then scarcely attained peace. Soon afterwards comes the opening of the Council of Bâle. Two of Colette's greatest friends are there ; one, the Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, papal legate, who writes to give her news of the council over which he presides, knowing how deeply she is interested in it ; the other William de Casale, the new Minister General of the Franciscans at Rome, who has a profound veneration for Colette. He it is who first definitely upholds her reform and gives it the sanction of his supreme authority. Several of his letters to Colette have been preserved and published ; they show the important place which she then held in the Order of St. Francis of Assisi.

It is really not until the year 1434, when Colette, having drawn up her Constitutions in their final form, submitted them to the Franciscan General for his approval, that we can begin to estimate the extent of her reform and its ramifications. For, partly through her own work, partly through her lieutenants, of whom Père Henri de la Baume was the first and greatest ; and again, through the friars who, by special and permanent author-

ity of the pope, were established in the neighbourhood of each of her convents ; the spirit of her reform had spread far and wide, much farther and wider than a mere list of the convents she founded would lead one to suppose. Many other monasteries, both of men and women, which cannot be enumerated, but which, according to Olivier de la Marche amounted to several hundreds,\* agreed to revive the original Franciscan ideal and adopted "the Colettine observance" by leading a more perfect life, observing a stricter obedience and, above all, an absolute poverty. At the General Chapter of the Order at Toulouse, in 1436, mention was made of numerous convents, belonging to the different French provinces, which had adopted her reform ; while in Italy the very similar work of St. Bernardine of Sienna showed a great advance and increase. He speaks of himself as the "disciple," and the "vicar" of Colette, for whom he had the greatest veneration, although they had never met. Then in Spain, three years later, we hear of six more monasteries, either new foundations or newly reformed, at Salamanca in the province of Corunna, at Zamora, and at Orense, and it is believed that they had been founded or influenced from the French monastery of Lézignan.

It cannot be denied that this "reform" of St. Colette is rigorous in the extreme. It demands from those who adopt it a hidden and silent heroism, unrewarded on earth and unrecognised : and one is filled with wonder and admiration that so many human beings have risen to such heights.

\* "It has been ascertained that by her efforts and trouble she built in her own time three hundred and eighty churches of enclosed and cloistered women." (Olivier de la Marche, *Memoires*, Chap. I.).

Colette's *Constitutions*, which were evidently intended only for the convents of women, were drawn up by her at the beginning of her work, probably at Poligny between 1412 and 1417; but she did not put them into their final form until many years subsequently, after they had stood the test of experience. The special "Colettine" regulations concerning women are:—an obligation of the strictest enclosure; then silence, of which she says that "where there is no talking there is little need for rules"; work, both intellectual and manual; and the recitation of the Hours, or Office, a prayer of perpetual praise to God, associated with the different times of the day. The general regulations, those which were regarded as essential for the friars as well as for the nuns, were, first, obedience to Rome; that is to say, that they were subject, not to the French provincials, but to vicars sent direct by the Father General at Rome; next, and most important of all, poverty. We saw what happened at Dôle, after the coming of Colette and the reformers who were with her; and practically the same thing took place in every monastery where the reform was accepted. When a community adopted these innovations, it became necessary for them to distribute to the poor all the possessions of the monastery. They were obliged to renounce all annuities which had been given or bequeathed to them, to leave themselves without any pecuniary resources or provision from one day to another. Such a state of uncertainty, especially for anyone approaching old age, is one of the most trying conditions imaginable. The resources of these convents were often very meagre; and yet they were now asked to face still further privations. Let us remember that these friars were not in any way *obliged* to this renuncia-

tion ; that they had full permission from various popes to live as they had been doing, and more especially to retain the bequests made to their churches. And when they gave up all, it became necessary for them to work and to seek for alms in order to live. Nevertheless, greatly to the honour of the brethren and of those who initiated these reforms, we see that a great number accepted this penitential life ; some of course with great ardour, others more or less reluctantly or only through the necessity of being in the movement. But what a task, what a tremendous undertaking it was, to suggest and uphold a standard so severe ! The apostles who attempted it had certainly need to light before the eyes of these Franciscans that same dazzling flame of heroic love, of selfless abnegation, which had glowed in the heart of Little Brother Francis and had never quite lost its power over his disciples. How are we to explain these sudden outbursts of fervour, unless by the attraction always felt by noble and courageous souls for ideals difficult of attainment, for deeds which seem beyond mere human strength ? Happily, these renewals of devotion were accompanied by a special and entrancing joy—perhaps as a result of them, perhaps as a recompense ; so that these friars of the fifteenth century, having renounced a very modest luxury—that of knowing that they would not die of want during the week, experienced a relief, an uplifting, unknown to the materialists and feasters of this world—were, in short filled with the fundamental joy of St. Francis, of the man who owns absolutely nothing.

This great work of the “ conversion ” of the friars, a truly enormous undertaking, although shared by Colette’s confessor Pierre de Reims, was for the most part carried

out by Henri de la Baume. He was the chief promoter and apostle of the "reformed" Franciscan monks in France. In the year 1434, he could look back on twenty-eight years spent in journeying from place to place with Colette. In all matters he had been her adviser, her confidant, her support, her friend ; in all her undertakings, her deputy or assistant. He had undergone extraordinary fatigues and accomplished innumerable good works. In all things done by the Abbess since the first day of her marvellous career as a religious reformer, he had interested himself in every detail, had made wise suggestions or corrected mistakes. He was a man of great wisdom, broadminded, clear sighted, intelligent, of unwearied self-sacrifice. It was he who first urged Colette to her great work ; afterwards, it was she who became the leading spirit. Looking back, we see how he devoted his whole life to this business ; how he was carried away by the burning zeal of this holy woman ; how he spent his years at the task to which she had set her hand, and one half of which he himself, by his own exertions, had accomplished.

Already seventy years have passed over his head. Old age has enfeebled him. And Colette grieves at the thought of his approaching death. In more than one previous illness her prayers have saved him. What a close and sacred friendship has been theirs during all these years ! Occasionally Colette has worked miracles through his agency, while he has often witnessed her ecstasies, has seen her countenance illumined by the radiance of a world to which he had not yet the key. He wished to write down all that he knew concerning her, but she, hearing of this, was so annoyed that he was obliged to obey her orders and burn the manuscript. All her difficulties had

been shared by him ; together they rejoiced in moments of success ; together they took heart for new exertions after failure or rebuffs. Colette knew his every thought and he knew hers ; their loyal friendship had never known either shadow or decline.

Meanwhile death approaches. At Castres ten years previously she had been so terrified at the possibility of his dying that she had hastened to his side. " Henri de la Baume being at Castres in Albigeois," writes Sœur Perrine, " was grievously and mortally ill. She, being at the convent of Lézignan in the low country, having first gone to great trouble to provide him, as far as she could with everything necessary, useful, and suitable for his health, set out in haste, and went to help him in his extreme necessity."

Colette and Père Henri were both at Besançon in 1439, and it was there he was stricken with the illness which was to be his last. Colette had him carried into the nuns' oratory, so as to be able to assist him in his last moments, and it was in this chapel he expired.

Among those letters of the saint which have come down to us is one telling of his death and of the grief which it caused her. It is addressed to the Sisters of the convent at Vevey and dated from Besançon, the 26th February, 1439. It reveals a very tender heart.

Our very dear and much-loved Sisters in God, unworthy as I am and know myself to be before Our Lord, I recommend my poor soul to your good prayers and devotions . . . and I wish to tell you that recently deep sorrow has come upon me, with anguish and bitterness both of soul and body, and not without good cause ; for on Ash Wednesday last, after Matins, our Reverend Father, Frère Henri, became much more grievously ill, so that on the following Thursday, shortly before midnight, he was brought to our chapel,



and there very devoutly, in the presence of our said good Fathers and brethren and myself, he received very devoutly the precious Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ and immediately after the sacrament of Extreme Unction ; and after this, he said farewell to all the Sisters, and returned to his room, somewhat better than he had been previously or so it seemed to us. On Saturday and Sunday he was very weak, and on Monday also, during the whole day, he was in our chapel and oratory, in the presence of those already mentioned, full of devotion and of the remembrance of God, as he was at all times. He heard all the Passions read, also the Recommendations of the soul departing, and at six and a-half hours after mid-day, while saying his prayers and speaking to Our Lord, he gave up his beautiful and glorious soul tranquilly and piously to God our holy Creator. Which soul, as far as I am able and know how, with all possible love and affection, I recommend to you, begging of you with my whole heart, that if you loved him loyally in life, your love may not be lessened after his death but rather increased, doing your duty as well as you possibly can by praying to God for him, knowing as you do how much he deserved this. And although I believe there is greater need that he should pray for us than we for him, I recommend his beautiful soul to the good Father Confessor and to all our fathers and brethren ; and with all my poor powers I pray the blessed Holy Spirit that He may keep you in His holy grace, and grant you at last the grace of Paradise. Amen.

She herself probably wrote on this occasion to all her convents, as we have another letter which she wrote to announce his death to the monastery at Le Puy, in which she says : " He was ever to us a true father, a good and pious pastor." Père Henri was interred in the chapter house of the Sisters, at Besançon, so that by a very special privilege his grave is within the enclosure of the convent. His remains, after various translations and peregrinations, especially during the French Revolution, were brought back at last to the chapel of the Convent of St. Clare at Besançon, where they now repose. With tender piety, Colette had placed beside him those things

which he used when officiating as a priest ; a chasuble, an alb, a stole, a maniple, and some smaller ecclesiastical objects which he had used. She always venerated him as a saint.

In this year 1439, during which she loses this companion of her laborious life, she herself has left her youth far behind. She is now fifty-eight years old.

## CHAPTER V.

### COLETTE THE SAINT. HER MIRACLES.

DURING all these years, throughout all these labours, while the foundress and reformer was at work, her personal character was developing ; the saint was becoming more saintly. To the public of that day, Colette was merely a person of wonderful zeal, very renowned, very influential. She was said to be a saint—that century with practically unanimous voice proclaimed her one—but the details or quality of her sanctity was unknown to them. On the other hand, those who lived in close intimacy with her could think only of her wonderful perfection. If these friends had been asked about her works, about the dates of her life, about her travels, they could have told us nothing. For they, seeing the saint day by day, have been entirely absorbed in contemplating the radiance of her virtues. Penances, visions, ecstasies, miracles,—all these things they have seen, and in their love and admiration they have sought to hand on to us the wondrous tales, written while their eyes were still dazzled by the marvels they had witnessed.

We already know the two chronicles of Colette's inner life. Sœur Perrine de la Baume, the niece of Père Henri, had entered the convent when very young and had been closely associated with the Mother Abbess for many

years, watching over her, nursing her in illness, accompanying her on many of her journeys. Pierre de Vaux is one of Colette's greatest friends, and her confessor as well. He is a Franciscan. He is also known as Pierre de Reims, probably on account of the University at which he had taken his degrees, and also to distinguish him from another Franciscan, Pierre de Lyon who often accompanied Colette on her missions. Both Perrine and Pierre de Vaux wrote after the death of the saint. Henri de la Baume, on his part, began to write during her lifetime, but we know already that she forced him to burn his manuscript. Possibly he recommenced it in secret. One of the best and earliest of Colette's biographers, Père Sylvère d'Abbeville, asserts that he did so. Of this precious document, however, nothing authentic remains, except some details full of life and interest which are incorporated in the narrative of Sylvère.

As for the other two narratives, happily they are in our hands, full of freshness and vigour and also of devoted affection. Both one and the other are rich in facts and details, with occasional repetitions, indeed, but each completing the other. Their sole object is to edify us ; they aim at being a eulogy as accurate as possible of the saint who had just died. They seem to say to us, " Could such a memory be allowed to perish in forgetfulness ? " The method adopted by Pierre de Vaux and imitated by Sœur Perrine consists in classifying the doings and sayings of the saint according to the virtue to which they bear some relation,—her purity, her spirit of poverty, and of penance, her love of God ; telling afterwards of her sufferings, her supernatural gifts and her miracles. We have thus so many pictures and mirrors wherein

Colette's life is reflected—often in its smallest details ; for both works are long and meticulous. There are very few personages of the fifteenth century, even the most notable, concerning whom such precise and intimate records exist. And to add to their interest, to their historical value, and, if we may so express it, to their weight as evidence, we constantly find in both books, the statement that the writers were eye-witnesses of the facts related, or had heard them from others who were present. “ I being present,” writes Perrine ; or “ I have heard the good Father Henri say ” ; and Pierre de Vaux says the same thing : “ Being with me during a journey to one of her convents, it happened that—etc.” So that, aided by these documents, so entirely worthy of credence, we may now attempt some description of the remarkable personality of the saint.

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Her intimate friends call her “ our gentle mother,” “ our dear and glorious Mother Colette.” They tell us she was benign and patient, ever heedful of the wants of others, pausing when ever she came in contact with suffering either to cure it or to sympathise ; compassionate to all who were unhappy, loving gentleness and mercy, a great admirer of charity no matter where she meets it, and herself all generosity of heart. Like St. Francis of Assisi, this overflowing kindness makes her care for and protect animals : like him also, she prefers those which are small and those which look whitest and most innocent ; little birds, especially turtle-doves ; lambs, the timid hares and their like. Beasts approach her fearlessly. A lark, a bird usually very difficult to tame, eats out of the bowl while she is at table. Other little birds come to her window, and

then, says Sœur Perrine, alight “ while singing away on her hand.” She loves them and easily makes friends with them. In one of her convents, she had reared a little white lamb. He follows her everywhere, even into the church, where the nuns have taught him to kneel at the sound of the consecration bell. Another little white creature is often seen near her, which they think must be an ermine ; she alone can approach it ; from everyone else it runs and hides. Only Mère Colette has the unfailing gentleness which disarms all distrust and timidity.

Her humility is profound. Although she is Abbess General of all the reformed convents, and directress of several hundred friars and nuns, who are subject to her in all parts of the world, she will never accept any title but that of “ Sœur Colette.” This is the signature to all her letters, and she generally adds some expression of humility, such as “ the handmaid of Our Lord and unworthy and useless servant of God.” When beginning a letter she asks for prayers in some such terms as these : “ My poor and pitiable soul, the poorest in the whole world, I humbly recommend to you.” Simple, eager humility is her refuge and her support. She tries to hide herself. She wishes to be forgotten. When she arrives at one of the monasteries founded by herself, she immediately places herself under the orders of the abbess ; even in a convent where she herself is abbess—that of La Pitié at Poligny for example. She delegates her office from time to time to others, so as to feel herself for a while just an ordinary nun and to follow the common rule to the letter. At these times she serves in the kitchen and washes up the Sisters’ plates ; she is the least conspicuous



member of the community, just like the country girl who has recently entered the noviceship and to whom no one pays any special attention. The smallest room in the convent is always the one she chooses. She prefers one which is particularly narrow and low, and is dissatisfied if any other has been prepared for her. Sometimes when building a convent, she constructs a cell to suit her own wishes. By a special privilege, she has permission to live in a room opening into the interior of the church. So that her " oratory " wherever she has a special one in the convents is a tiny cell adjacent to the chapel into which it opens by means of a grated window. There she prays, there she interviews the sisters, there she eats and sleeps : through the wicket she assists at the offices of the Church and receives Holy Communion. These oratories, her special dwelling places, are very small ; usually she can barely stand upright in them. They are little better than kennels. But it is only in them that she considers herself " properly housed." The building of her monasteries always seems to her " too handsome and imposing," and she prefers to dwell—not in the convents which are fairly well off—but in those which are poorest and where one eats anything and everything. When alone she takes her meals sitting on the ground. She carries with her wherever she goes her little bowl \* hollowed out of wood, and from it eats whatever she is given. She prefers small towns to great cities, cottages to castles. During all her travels, although obliged to accept hospitality from all kinds of people, she chooses whenever possible the least pretentious. When visiting the palace of a prince, or the mansion of some great noble, she tries not to look

\* It is still preserved in the monastery of Poligny (Jura).

around her, not to see the gorgeous decorations through which she has to pass ; they only make her suffer. For she is always thinking of the places where Christ dwelt while on earth, and what were they ? The crib, the workshop, the cross, a boat on the lake at night. She cannot endure the contrast.

In making decisions, she is anxious to consult everyone, even the youngest of her novices. She never keeps anything for herself. If she is sent money to buy better clothing she gives it to the community ; if some great personage makes her a present of a beautifully-illuminated breviary, she hands it over to one of her nuns.

While it is always her desire that others should be properly attended to, she herself is content with the least portion of everything. But whenever the Divine Praises are in question she will have nothing wanting, nothing shabby, and for this reason she gets office books from Germany for her nuns ; as for herself she can borrow some one else's breviary. In the same way with her clothes. She requires that the sisters' robes and mantles shall be cut out in her presence, so that everyone should have whatever is necessary and at the same time that nothing should be wasted. But for herself, any old habit is good enough. We have visible proof of this touching economy where Colette herself was concerned in her own mantle still preserved at Ghent. It is a long cloak of coarse woollen material, brownish grey in colour, and its lining is made of various scraps of material carefully pieced together. It is made to fit the shoulders, falling in straight lines down to the feet. Well may we venerate this mantle, worn by the saint herself, repaired by her skilful fingers, every line speaking of her, of the form

which it clothed, of the patience which kept it together.\* As for the robe itself, "a poor, patched habit," says Perrine, she possesses only one. When the bodice is good, new sleeves are put in; when the sleeves last longest, a new bodice. Sometimes there are no sleeves at all, they have been ripped out and given to someone who was cold. On examining her clothes after her death, this habit is found to consist of "more than a hundred pieces."

"No one could believe the penance she imposed on her body, if they had not seen it," says Sœur Perrine; and she adds: "I, who served her for so long, have myself seen it." One is sometimes tempted to ask how she managed to exist, because the kind of life she led required a certain amount of strength, and it is difficult to know what supported her. Her usual food is some soup, with a little bread, once a day. She often fasts completely for several days in succession, and once during a whole Lent. We read of these singular facts in the lives of several saints, who themselves admitted them to be exceptional, and who refused to permit those around them to adopt these practices, discouraging rash imitations of their own austerities. We find, in fact, that the sisters, while marvelling at Colette's penances, speak of her lovingly as being "open-handed and liberal," careful and motherly, where her nuns were concerned.

By acting in this way she leaves herself more free to do penance as she pleases, and to make light of the discomfort and pain which she often endures. She is never known to warm herself; when it is very cold, some embers are

\* The Poor Clares of Ghent show this mantle to pilgrims, as a special privilege. The authoress of this work had it on her shoulders for a few moments in 1913.

placed in a pot and brought to her room. Her bed is a truss of straw between two supports of wood, with a bag of straw for a pillow, and a single blanket. All her life she sleeps like a soldier on duty—without taking off her habit. No matter how cold it is, she adds nothing to her clothing nor to this single thin covering. Finding that someone, without telling her, has lined her cloak warmly, she is displeased, and has the lining taken out. During many years, she has worn an iron chain round her waist, and as the years pass, the flesh has covered the chain and grown into the links. A nun who is in her confidence, seeing how much she is suffering, tells Père Henri of the torture, and he, believing that Colette is thereby injuring her health so valuable for many reasons, bids her take off this belt. She obeys, but the remedy is quite as terrible as the suffering itself. For she attaches the end of the chain to the wall and unrolls it roughly, tearing the flesh in many places.

She scarcely sleeps at all ; sometimes only one hour in eight days. It is during the night that she prays, and follows in spirit the souls of those of her children who are far away and whom she never forgets. It is during the night that, free from worldly cares, she can give mind and heart to meditation and ecstasy.

Her health, like that of most mystics, is worn out by penances and by the constant tension of a mind overdriven to the limits of its capacity, so that she lives in continual exhaustion and manifold sufferings. The privations which she continually inflicts on herself are in themselves sufficient to undermine any ordinary constitution. She seems indeed to have been naturally very robust. But from her youth onwards various nervous troubles

showed themselves, and increased as the years went on. She suffered constant pain. Where others would have given in at thirty years old under the strain of hard work and spiritual trials combined, her energy and natural powers of resistance carried her on to the age of sixty-six ; and one can notice in many ways her tenacious hold on life. But her illnesses are constant. Pain in her limbs, pain in her head or in her face—she is never free from pain. When she sees her nuns about to retire for the night she says : “ How happy you are ! you can take some rest ; as for me, it is now that my sufferings begin.” The severe neuralgia to which she is subject is of that kind which an effort of the will seems to suspend or blunt for a while, but which returns afterwards with renewed violence. Perrine notices that whenever it becomes necessary to speak to someone, or to receive a visitor, the pain goes away, even though it had previously been severe enough to prevent her moving. Colette seems to brace up her energies, to find in action her accustomed power and lucidity ; then, the effort once made, she pays for it by increased pain. Does she take any care of her health ? There is nothing to show it. She is never known to interrupt or put off a journey. It is only when her eyes become affected that she becomes alarmed and shows great diligence in taking the remedies prescribed. To be able to see, and more especially, as she says to her nuns, to see the image of God on earth—in the faces of human beings, so full of varying expressions ; to contemplate the Blessed Sacrament ; to read the Book of Hours, a devotion which she always loved deeply ; these were the pleasures, the blessings which she could not make up her mind to renounce. It seemed to her less

terrible to lose all her limbs than to lose her sight. But in spite of her fears and her precautions, she suffers intensely from her eyes—especially at the end of her life.

She is also subject to chronic rheumatism which is sometimes extremely painful ; and from her fortieth year onwards her heart seems to be affected ; she suffers from swellings of the legs and body. If when suffering acutely she allows any complaint to escape her, she apologises for her impatience. “ I am ready to grumble for very little cause,” she says. But the pain she endures never makes her idle ; if any good work has to be done, her zeal seems to brace her up to meet the necessity. She insists on going wherever she is needed, even when she appears too weak to be able to walk ten steps. Her sufferings scarcely ever cease ; sometimes she has not “ a single hour of respite in a whole week,” though on the other hand when the pain does cease, it goes away completely. And when this does happen, instead of her being as one would expect, worn out, and struggling slowly towards recovery, all traces of illness seem to vanish, and her strength and vigour return. While the pains are there she is bent and distorted, but the moment they cease, she straightens herself up and resumes her ordinary appearance ; and will even say : “ I no longer remember that I had pain or ache.” The nuns, and also Pierre de Vaux, seem to draw a distinction between sufferings which were merely human and natural, and those which were more mysterious ; when, for instance, one can trace a resemblance to those of Christ and his Saints, or when the pain increases on special feast days, seeming to crush her more and more when the solemn festivals come round. Of this kind also are those which resemble the tortures of the saints and



martyrs—tortures to which her ardent devotion wishes to conform. She becomes a mirror and replica of their sufferings.

“All the cruel martyrdom and grievous torments which many of the most glorious saints in Paradise have borne in their holy bodies, she had borne and suffered, one after the other, in actual fact, by the will of God. To one of her father confessors she said with simplicity : ‘To the glorious and holy martyrs who are in Paradise, God gave great grace, and that very cheaply ; they were either boiled or roasted, or had their heads cut off quickly.’ No week passed during which she did not suffer more than one kind of martyrdom, of which one was that she was roasted like St. Laurence (and the effects of fire can be present without the fire, just as fire can be present without taking any effect). And this martyrdom of torment used to keep at her for the space of a whole night. Sometimes she was tormented like Monsieur St. Vincent, sometimes crucified, sometimes flayed, sometimes crushed, sometimes boiled. Sometimes she used to say that it seemed to her as if someone split her heart across the middle and then, having filled it with burning salt, sewed it up again. Sometimes it seemed to her as if she had fiery embers in her entrails, or burning coals of fire in her eyes. When she was suffering thus, alone in her oratory, after everyone had retired for the night, then the blessed angels of Paradise used to come to comfort her and to give her the charitable assistance of which she had need, helping her to lie down on her pallet and compassionately spreading the blanket over her.”



We have already spoken of her attractive appearance as a young girl, and she undoubtedly retained this beauty and charm throughout her life. Of tall and imposing figure, her features were regular and striking, her complexion transparent and colourless. She held herself erect, “her face clear, her eyes large, very beautiful and agreeable.” Her carriage, her deportment, the expression of her countenance, deeply impressed those who saw her for the first time. No one could forget her affability,

or the bright charm of her manner ; and still less the impressive eloquence of her conversation.

Colette unquestionably did possess the eloquence found sometimes in a very striking form in women. It became still more remarkable with increasing years and increasing mental endowments. She is constantly discoursing, exhorting. This facility of speech is her special gift, her weapon, her power. Words come to her at will, words of glowing and persuasive eloquence, words which penetrate, intimidate, or convince. She employs this gift of hers in all sorts of ways ; at one time to shame wicked men, at another to defend her nuns and herself during their journey through a wild country where they were attacked by a band of no less wild robbers. These find her remonstrances so disconcerting that they go away quietly, allowing the sisters to pass without doing them any harm, and even offering to protect them against the other robbers then overrunning the region. But above and beyond all it is when Colette speaks of God that her gift of speech becomes a burning flame. To promote her apostolic work, to conquer an opposing will, she uses her most ingenious arguments, her most persuasive tones.

This oratorical gift is much enhanced by her voice, which is invariably referred to by those giving testimony concerning her life. The ringing tones of this voice and its unusual range always appeared remarkable, both when singing or reciting the Office or when merely speaking. Nowadays, if one listens to the Office chanted in a chapel of Poor Clares, one hears little more than a murmur. This was not so in Mère Colette's time. She used to say that it was from the angels themselves she had taken

lessons in chanting the Office. One day, feeling some doubt as to the proper way of reciting it, she had discussed the matter with Père Henri; and afterwards when engaged in meditation, both had seemed to hear within themselves an unearthly chant of ravishing beauty. Colette had then taught her nuns to chant the Office according to the celestial model which she had heard. But it was certainly not in undertones. She herself when in choir used to chant the psalms with a voice so strong and resonant that she could be heard at a distance. I do not know which of the princesses her friends it was (perhaps the Comtesse de Nevers) who noticed this one night: the sisters were singing in their convent a little distance away, and Colette's voice dominated all the others across the sleeping country.

Everything done by Colette shows this same characteristic strength and ardour, this same bringing into play of all her forces. Need we wonder that one prepared to dedicate herself so unreservedly should have strong power over others? Need we wonder that educated and benevolent people were willing to hear her, when a troop of bandits in a wood listen to her and treat her with respect? The incident related just now is not an isolated instance of what occurred during her travels. At another time, when visiting her convents, she found it necessary to go from one province to another while these provinces were at war, with all passes between the two countries guarded by men-at-arms. She found herself in a part of the country held by a number of soldiers, and a company of these met her escort and arrested them. Finding that Colette wishes to go into the enemy's country and holds a passport from their antagonist they conclude

that she is in league with him, and that she deserves to be treated as an enemy herself. The soldiers also insult the nuns; some threaten that they will kill them, others declare that they will cut off their ears; meanwhile they take possession of all the horses.

Colette, seeing their danger, assumed full responsibility for all. "In the same way," writes Pierre de Vaux, "that Our Lord said to the Jews who came to seek Him that they might put Him to death, 'If you take me, let these go,' in the same way Colette sent away her friars and friends, and remained ready and prepared to die alone and for all." Left by herself, she addressed the soldiers. Utterly fearless and confident and strong, God put, says the chronicler, "such eloquence into her words, that the soldiers refused to do any evil or harm against her or her escort, giving back their horses and their goods, and allowing them to continue their journey in peace."

At the various places where she resided or passed through, she received numerous visitors. They were of all kinds, some attracted by curiosity, some still more dangerous characters. But one glance from Colette's tranquil eyes was usually sufficient to disconcert any evil-doer who ventured into her presence. She did not shut her eyes to the evils and follies of the world, but held them in great abhorrence and tried to keep aloof from them as far as possible. Her favourite virtue was purity, and she had an intense, almost rigorous dislike of all that did not conform to the highest ideals on the subject.\*

\* By the Papal Bull *Ad futuram rei memorandum* (No. 1013 of the *Bullaire*) the Pope had granted in the following terms the request (afterwards withdrawn) formulated by Colette at the beginning of her reform, to receive none but unmarried women into her community.

Evil minded persons coming into her presence felt uneasy and ashamed of their secret thoughts. Like all exceptional beings, she attracts to her orbit those who are indifferent, even evil, as well as those who are edifying and admirable. But she, radiating light, is no more affected by these passing shadows than the sky of the desert which dissipates or absorbs the fleeting clouds. Various calumnies were circulated from time to time with regard to her practice of poverty. She had, of course, many personal enemies, many adversaries of her reform ; and they declared that having been entrusted with a great deal of money she kept it for herself ; that she lent it out at usurious rates and speculated on the exchange in the different countries through which she passed ; and it was alleged that she had various monetary interests at a time when she was in fact living in want almost of necessaries. But no one ever dared to cast any reflection on her purity. What anguish such an insinuation would have caused her !\*

Among the saints of the Old Testament, those remarkable for their purity attract her most ; in the New Testament, her favourite is St. John the Evangelist.

“It is so excellent that persons in the ecclesiastical state, especially those belonging to the weaker sex, should renounce the attractions of the world, and, disdaining all earthly love, vow themselves to Him who is beautiful above all the children of men—that it seems right to consent to this request . . . ”, etc.

\* Jehan Foucalt, who had been expelled from Dôle, was, as one might expect, one of her implacable enemies. Her life was attempted several times ; by poison no less than three times. But she would never allow any proceedings to be taken ; and although she knew whence the attacks came, she always forbade any denunciation of her enemies.

Whatever is spotless and innocent attracts her affection.



Knowing her thus, we are all the more edified to see with what kindness she treats sinners. She has a horror of sin ; any offence against the Divine law makes her suffer acutely, but when the sinner comes before her, she has no feeling left but that of compassion. She looks on these culprits as typifying all those for whom the Redemption was accomplished, and desires that they should never be held in abhorrence, since it was for them that Christ came on earth. For this reason they are to her not alone objects of pity ; they are, in a sense, sacred. She also considers them an example of the weakness inherent in every human being, and declares herself to be, like them, a sinner. " I am one of them," she says. She does her best to console and strengthen them. All during her life, both in places where she resides and in those where she is merely passing through, she is overwhelmed with confidences—sometimes even confessions. She is so kind to all, so completely devoid of arrogance, that men sometimes come to tell her of " great and enormous sins " which they fear to confess to a priest. She listens, admonishes, brings her inward grace to bear upon these burthensome or ugly secrets, until the culprit at last decides to go to the Sacraments. She is constantly a stepping stone for the half-repentant, as they try to cross the stream dividing them from heavenly grace. Her patience is inexhaustible when there is question of winning a heart long claimed by some vice or made insensible by some old and still-unpurged crime.

Among the numbers whom she was instrumental in



winning back to a good life was a certain nobleman at Poligny (Jura) who had not been to confession for thirty years. He was proud and hard of heart, and she could not overcome his repugnance to confession. He had told her the story of his life, but could not bring himself to reveal his sins to a priest. So at last she knelt down before him, and very humbly accused herself of his failings, mentioning them by one. He was deeply touched, and consented to go to confession.

Another case was that of a young nun in one of the reformed convents, who had formerly committed a grave sin, which she had never had the courage to confess. It was some years since this had happened ; and when she had been received into the monastery no one had doubted her virtue. Of the past fault no trace remained except her secret remorse and shame. She was, we are told, amiable and edifying in her conversation. Her one wish was to be absolved from her fault, and to put it out of her mind for ever. She used to pass by churches, longing to enter and go to confession, but unable to summon up sufficient courage. For more than six years she had endured this painful struggle ; but at last she confided it to Colette, telling her of her sin and of the shame which kept her from confessing it. Colette desired her to go there and then to receive the Sacrament of Penance, remaining herself in prayer for this suffering soul. When the young nun returned, forgiven and happy, she expressed her amazement at her own long repugnance to a duty so easily accomplished.

Among the numerous anecdotes concerning sinners which we find in Colette's life there is one reminding us of St. Catherine of Sienna, who was remarkable for her

charity towards those condemned to death. Chronologically, indeed, Colette directly follows the great Dominican saint of Italy, because she was born the same year that Catherine of Sienna died ; and in many ways—in mystical piety, in social good works—she perpetuated her memory.

Colette was on one occasion at Aigueperse, a little town in Auvergne. Two criminals, a man and a woman, had recently been tried there and condemned to death. They were notoriously wicked and convicted of heinous crimes. The town looked on them with horror, because even on the eve of their death they remained obdurate in their crimes ; and not alone did they refuse all spiritual help and show themselves entirely unrepentant, but they showered blasphemous language and abuse on all, including the priests, who came near them. The morning of the execution arrived, and the two criminals were brought to the gallows. But as they were about to be executed the priest who accompanied them, a very devout monk, who was filled with horror at the thought of letting these two souls depart to eternal damnation without having exhausted every possibility of saving them, suddenly thought of Colette, who was then in the town. He begged that the execution might be deferred until he had seen her. His request was granted, as all present were in consternation at the impious despair of those about to die, and the monk hurried to Colette's monastery. We do not know whether he brought her back with him to the criminals, or whether, having himself seen the holy nun, he conveyed to them her exhortations. At all events, Colette was filled with compassion at his tidings. Extending her arms in the form of a cross, she began to recite aloud the psalm : *Miserere mei, Domine !* with tears

rolling down her cheeks. She seemed, as it were, to assume in her own person the identity of the sinner. And whether the two criminals saw her thus or that they were touched by the description given to them, their hard hearts were suddenly softened. They confessed their sins, declared that they accepted death in expiation of their evil lives, and died in peace and resignation.

The salvation of sinners strongly attracted her zealous soul, but was in some ways a source of torment to her. Her meditations were often saddened by contemplation of the miseries of the world—so widespread, so deep. One night that she was praying for mankind, she seemed to see in front of her as if in response to her prayer, a golden dish covered with pieces of flesh like that of a child, and heard the Blessed Virgin Mary say to her : “ How can I appeal to my Child for those who, each day, by the horrible sins and offences which they commit against Him through their self-love, cut Him up into smaller pieces than the flesh on this dish is cut up ? ” So terrible a vision troubled and haunted her for a long time.

One day a woman who was employed at the convent fell as if dead at the door. Colette being informed, comes to look after her, and is not long in discovering that the poor creature’s spiritual condition is quite as bad as her bodily health ; so she remains with her until both body and soul are healed. It was always so with Colette. A soul in peril came before every other duty, even when the soul was that of a poor charwoman. She prays with this sinner often while assisting her at her daily work with great kindness, until she has brought her back to the path of religion and piety.

During the early years of Colette’s reform, it happened

one day that when she was setting out on a long journey, she was informed that a Franciscan friar had been taken ill while on a journey, and was now lying at the point of death in a monastery some little distance from the road by which she was going. She at once decided to take a more circuitous route in order to visit him. This friar, whose name was Pierre Psalmon, had a great reputation for learning ; he was a doctor of theology of the Paris University, a priest, a personage of importance. In the years which followed his restoration to health he devoted himself unreservedly to Colette's service ; and we find him mentioned more than once in the story of her life as an ardent advocate of her reform. Colette hurried to the monastery and asked to be brought to see the sick man. She found him in a dying condition ; his lower limbs were already becoming cold and death seemed imminent. Colette, having studied him attentively, decided that there was still hope ; and, stooping, she traced on him the sign of the Cross, while calling him gently by his name. He, not having yet lost consciousness, was able to understand who his visitor was. She then said to him very quietly : " Be of good heart ; have confidence in the goodness of Our Lord ; " and went away. She was scarcely gone when her expectations were fulfilled, and Psalmon began, little by little, to recover. As soon as he was completely restored to health, he hurried, full of gratitude, to the town whither she had gone, and begged of her to take him into her service, offering to be her devoted servant for the rest of his life. Colette, who could read him through and through, permitted him to remain near her, not in order to avail herself of his services, but rather that she might continue the good work

begun, but not finished, in his restoration to health. With great gentleness she set herself to bring about an amendment in the life of Pierre, who was very far from being a devout religious. As soon as he had decided to reform his life, she told him of a confessor on whose prudence and judgment he could confidently rely. To this priest Pierre Psalmon accordingly made his way, and soon returned saying that he had made a full and complete confession of his numerous sins. But Colette did not believe him. "No!" she said, "through forgetfulness or through shame you have omitted several sins. Go back to where you came from." This happened three times! And the third time, when he had at last confessed all, he came back to Colette so terrified at her perspicacity that, ever after, no matter where he was, he did not dare to do wrong, believing that if he did, she would infallibly know of it.

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Quite the most remarkable convert of whom mention is made in Colette's life is Jacques de Bourbon, King of Naples. Among the many friends, men and women, whom she was able to influence in spiritual matters, his personality attracts our special sympathy and interest. For a long time his acquaintance with Colette was slight and indirect. As we have seen, she had sent a letter to him by Père de la Baume, at the time that his daughters, Isabeau and Bonne, wished to enter religion in one of Colette's convents: these two young girls, having been made known to Colette by their aunt the Duchess of Bourbon. Jacques de Bourbon was then in Provence. During the course of an eventful life, he showed an appreciative interest in things mystical, and was one of the most

assiduous among the royal pilgrims who used to go to Tours to visit their "cousin," Blessed Jeanne de Maillé, that saint so full of charm, that wondrous worker of miracles. Jacques always professed himself her devoted knight and fervent admirer.

Jacques de Bourbon belonged to the junior branch of the House of Bourbon, sprung from Robert of France, Count of Clermont, fourth son of St. Louis.\* Strikingly handsome, tall and well proportioned, carrying himself proudly erect, he was a redoubtable champion in the lists, a leader of tournaments, feasts, and dances. One of his sisters, Charlotte, wife of Janus II., King of Cyprus, was perhaps the most beautiful princess of her time. Her tomb, on which her statue stands erect, is built into the wall of the lower church at Assisi. Jacques, who for a long time was known as the Comte de la Marche, was a warrior from his earliest days. His cousin, the Comte of Nevers (afterwards Jean sans Peur) induced him to join him in his campaign against Bajazet. The noblest princes of France took part in this expedition, which ended disastrously in the defeat of Nicopolis. Jacques bore himself gallantly in the fighting, but was taken prisoner by Bajazet. Subsequently, when the prisoners were released, he came back to France, was given the office of Grand Chamberlain, spent several years at the court, and commanded several maritime expeditions—not always successful—round the coasts. When thirty-five years old he married his cousin, Beatrice of Navarre, daughter of Charles III. and Eleanor of Castille; and afterwards fought, in the interests of his father-in-law, against the Moors in Spain.

\*See Arthur Huart, *Jacques de Bourbon*, 1370-1448.—Couvin (Belgium), 1909.



Of his whole family, he was the only one who remained on friendly terms with the Duke of Burgundy, his companion-in-arms at Nicopolis. He fought against the Armagnacs, but that did not prevent him from fighting with equal vigour against the English ; indeed, he himself organised and armed against them one of the famous "*grandes compagnies*" of mercenaries and adventurers. He does not seem to have been particularly pious ; on the other hand, he was not irreligious. Very likely he was careless and indifferent. His reverence for Jeanne de Maillé was steadfast and unchanging, and on the death of this holy woman it was he who first promoted the cause of her beatification.

It was in 1415, at the very time that this process was begun, that Jacques, then aged forty-five, and a widower of a year's standing, was approaching the most fateful period of his life.

Ladislás, King of Naples, having died, his sister Joanna became Queen of Naples, Sicily, Hungary and Jerusalem.\* She was forty-seven years old and a widow ; her kingdom was rich and powerful. Soon a whole bevy of princes came forward as aspirants to her hand, among them being the Duke of York, first prince of the royal house of England ; the Infant of Arragon, and the Prince of Galilee. Jacques de Bourbon entered the lists, and he it was who obtained the prize.

This triumph, however, resulted, as far as he was concerned, in little except misfortune and unhappiness. The queen was anything but wise or prudent, and she allowed

\* This was Joanna II., not to be confounded with Joanna I., who came into relations with St. Catherine of Siena and St. Brigid and reigned from 1343 to 1382.

herself to be guided by her favourites. Jacques found on his arrival that the court was a network of intrigues ; and the queen at once refused him that position of equality with herself which he considered his right. This curious marriage, therefore, was inaugurated by a struggle on his part to obtain his proper prerogatives and even his proper title. And the quarrel thus engaged in between husband and wife was fanned into flame by quarrels between their courtiers and by plots and conspiracies against each sovereign in turn. Sometimes the king secures the upper hand, and then he shuts up his wife in her palace. Sometimes the queen is successful—she whom some describe as clever and others as weak, while her historian, Belleforest, calls her “ a perfidious woman.” She in her turn then casts the king into prison, the prison being the “ Egg Castle,” situated on the shore of the Neapolitan coast. In fact, for four years Jacques remains shut up there, Joanna meantime spending her days in gaiety and amusement, governing her kingdom with the help of one of the many adventurers who were hanging around the court. When at last, after innumerable disappointments, Jacques is released, through the intervention of influential Frenchmen and of the Pope, his former opponents, fearing his wrath, overwhelm him with marks of deference and treat him as a king : but all in vain. Declaring that he has had quite sufficient experience of this kind of honour and glory, he gives up the royal crown, leaves Naples, and retires to Venice. There, bitterness and disenchantment gradually lead him towards wisdom, and finally turn his thoughts to religion. He lives “ in great repentance and with little enjoyment,” without any pomp or ceremony, gradually detaching him-

self from all he had cared for, and turning his thoughts more and more towards piety and devotion.

When he returns to Castres in Provence, it is for the purpose of seeing, first, his eldest daughter and afterwards the youngest, enter religion ; and also to arrange for the marriage of his second daughter to Bernard d'Armagnac. Colette's letter has reached him. It is about this time that he succeeds in banishing the bitterness out of his soul ; " takes comfort in his adversity and resolves to await death while following the path of religious penance." \* He first put this resolution into practice by interesting himself in the monks of the celebrated monastery of St. Antoine in Dauphiné, † where he built a chapel. From that time onwards, he earnestly desired to become a monk. On learning that his two daughters were going with Colette to Savoy, he decided to join them there. He was very anxious to meet this celebrated nun, of whom he had heard so much. A quite recent disappointment had shown him anew the uncertainty of any ambitious hopes. The King of France had nominated him Captain-General of Languedoc and Guyenne ; but immediately afterwards, having decided on more pacific measures, gave up the war and cancelled the appointment.

Jacques, still known everywhere as the King of Naples, set out for Vevey with his daughter and her husband, Bernard d'Armagnac, and also the latter's natural son, Claude d'Aix. Although at the time he only intended to make a short stay at Vevey, he eventually remained there for several years. Jacques was greatly attracted by the luminous sanctity and wisdom of Colette, and immedi-

\* *Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche*, quoted by Huard, *op. cit.*

† Saint Antoine (Isère).

ately placed himself at her service. "*Le sérénissime roi Jacques, votre fils*" is the designation given him by William de Casale, General of the Order of Friars Minor, in a letter to Colette.

To train the king in spiritual matters now became Colette's task. She gave strength and courage to this disillusioned soul, developed its natural nobility, instructed its impulsive, almost childlike, faith. She accomplished this work with motherly kindness, and had a great regard for her somewhat singular disciple. After leaving Vevey she kept up a correspondence with him. He had become a tertiary of St. Francis, and lived a life of retirement in a small house near the Franciscan monastery. He was anxious to become a Franciscan, but Queen Joanna, his wife, was still alive, so he had to bide his time. In 1434, we find him at Bourges, drawing up a long and curious will, by which he distributed his goods in advance to the poor and requested that he should be buried near Colette "in whatever place her body shall repose." When Joanna of Naples died in 1435 he had the news conveyed to the Mother Abbess, then at Besançon. He himself was at the time at Vevey. Colette at once made arrangements for his reception into the Franciscan monastery at Besançon, and he set out for that town without delay.

But he had not yet entirely divested himself of the love of ceremonial pomp, and with a mixture of humility and pride, he made his journey a sort of public spectacle. As befits a king, he has an imposing train of attendants ; being also a penitent, he travels in a scavenger's cart ! This is how he makes his entry into Portarlier. The people are amazed ; they do not understand these eccen-

tricies. "Edified" they may be; they certainly are surprised. The whole population of the town turns out to see him pass through the streets. In the cart used for removing the sweepings of the town is spread a little straw; and on this King Jacques reclines. Immediately following the cart are monks and clerics, then comes his household staff: two hundred horses fully caparisoned, and led by the bridle, then carriages filled with his arms, his equerries, his magnificently attired retainers. But the king himself wears a coarse grey robe girded with a cord and a white hood tied under his chin. A little boy\* who saw him pass thought him very handsome, and looking so young that, when relating this incident in after years, he states that the king was only forty-five years old, although in reality he was sixty.

His accustomed dignity of demeanour did not desert him even in these unfavourable surroundings, where anyone else might have appeared merely absurd. We are told that Colette was not pleased with this combination of magnificence and theatrical humility, being of opinion that it lacked genuine simplicity; and although it is said that Jacques made a similar entry into all the towns along his route, this seems to be contradicted by the Abbé Saint Laurent's statement that he entered Besançon with knightly dignity—" *en vrai chevalier*." Colette may have put a stop to these manifestations of an ill-regulated zeal, but the episode at Portalier passed into tradition. A century later, it was still subject-matter for mockery, as we see in the pages of Montaigne and Brantôme.†

\* Olivier de la Marche.

† Montaigne says: "What a fine thing it is to walk, while your horse is led by the bridle! And our friend Jacques, King of Naples

But in reality the king's piety was very genuine, with nothing about it either weak or wavering. Perhaps his only weakness—one which he retained to the end of his life—was with regard to his title as king, that title which had cost him so dear. When his novitiate was finished, he resided at Dôle with four friars minor in a house which he had purchased in the Rue Saint Vincent. It would appear that he was never a professed friar, that he remained a member of the Third Order. He did the most menial work, finding in it, he declared, more happiness than at any tournament or ball. Of his former luxurious mode of life he retained only two small objects ; a spoon of mother-of-pearl, and a cup of olive wood, hooped with silver, which can still be seen at Besançon. As with his title, so also with his personality as a king ; it was never entirely relinquished, and people often had recourse to him on diplomatic business of one kind or another. Whenever his intervention is requested he goes away, arranges matters, fulfils his mission, then returns to Dôle and his little Franciscan dwelling.

When Colette is residing at Besançon, he goes from Dôle to visit her ; his trustful faith in her help resembling that of a confiding child rather than of a king. The most striking characteristic of this monarch must certainly

and of Sicily, who, being young, handsome and healthy, has himself carried round the country in a wheelbarrow, reclining on a wretched feather pillow, attired in a robe of grey cloth with a hood of the same stuff, and who nevertheless is followed by a royal procession of officials, horses of all sorts led by hand, gentlemen and officers, was displaying an austerity still somewhat weak and wavering."

This picture is founded on the description given by Olivier de la Marche, who, himself a boy at school, saw the king's procession at Portarlier.



have been his spirit of perennial youth, entailing, no doubt, many defects, but also a great deal of charm. He whose wish it was that none should forget his royal dignity was constantly seeking for protection and shelter from Colette, and often declared that he depended altogether on her to bring him to heaven.

It was at Besançon that he spent the last years of his life, and he had the happiness of breathing his last in the presence of the saint, who ministered to him as she had done to Père Henri, in the chapel of the convent. He was buried there, as he had wished, "without coffin or bier, or shrine" of any sort; just in "the mother earth of all human beings," as he expresses it in his will. And then began the celebration of the ten thousand masses for which he had made provision in his will.

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So we see how many different destinies became interwoven with that of Colette, as the consequence of her benevolence and charity. She was surrounded by a circle of friends, and very often it was not they alone, but their children and grandchildren as well, who became the objects of her care.

Blanche of Geneva, one of her oldest friends and her earliest protectress, having died, her body was received by Colette into the chapel of Poligny, where the remains of both repose to the present day. The Saint's interest in King Jacques extended to his children, whom she was always willing to help. His daughter Eleanor was distressed at not having any children. Colette promised her sons and daughters, and prayed earnestly for this intention, telling the parents at the same time that one daughter of this much-desired family should be dedicated

to the service of God. Some years later, little Bonne d'Armagnac, born after these promises had been made, was told that she was destined for the life of a nun. When her parents made this announcement to her, she was just seventeen years old, and the youngest son of the King of France was asking for her hand in marriage. It was not easy to renounce such attractive prospects. But Colette quietly urged her parents to keep their promise, saying that no one ought to fail in an engagement made with God Himself. Bonne's life was short ; she entered the convent when twenty years old, and died a holy death soon afterwards.

Mahaut of Savoy, niece and heiress of Blanche of Geneva, had married Louis III. of Bavaria (known as "the Bearded"), Elector Palatine of the Rhine. She also had promised a daughter to Colette. When the proper time came, Colette sent a message to the princess by Pierre de Vaux, and Mahaut replied "that with a willing heart she would give up this first-born daughter, as she knew well that she had promised her to God," and added: "His lordship, her father, also gives her up freely." She herself, she says, will bring the young girl to France "as soon as the cold weather is over, perhaps after Easter, if it pleases God." Under these discussions we can trace very human feelings—the affection of the parents, the youth of the child thus offered up, a pang of grief, a silent protest of the heart ; but withal a living faith, a complete confidence in Colette's decisions, a fear of failing in their duty to God if they failed Colette. Was she not the arbitrator, the witness, the intermediary ? And if she has obtained favours from God, has she not also the right to demand the fulfilment of promises ?

Whenever we try to study the personality of a saint, to penetrate into the "mansions of the soul," as St. Teresa expresses it, our first thought is to seek for the moving spirit and centre of these lives, the watch-tower guarding these strong and stately mansions. Perhaps it is the ardour of their self-sacrifice which attracts our attention, or their zeal for the good of religion, or it may be their profound humility, or their ceaseless mortifications. At the same time we feel that there is some hidden force behind these virtues, some secret impetus which gives them life and strength. And so it seems as if all we have hitherto tried to learn regarding Colette were little or nothing; we feel that we have not yet grasped the full measure of her holiness, the key to her spiritual life. Those exterior virtues, the practice of which in a heroic degree ("heroicity" is the technical term) constitutes the material evidence of sanctity, seem in a way only the outward glow and flame of the hidden fires of the soul. There is a vital spark within, which keeps them alight, renews their beauty, ensures their permanence, and which in itself would sanctify a soul, had it never an opportunity of putting these virtues into practice. This secret force is the union of the human spirit with God; it is the fervour, the ardour caught from that union. The prayer of a saint is a very different thing from what we usually call prayer, meaning thereby a request for favours, an appeal for God's assistance when we are in danger, an outburst of gratitude or of repentance. A saint's prayer is the impulse of exceeding love, it is the expression of a soul irresistibly impelled towards God, and ever striving to attain Him. Such a prayer is not momentary, but constant; if it were not all energy, one might say that with

the saints it becomes a state. It is contemplation, it is union. The whole being is elevated towards the Light Eternal which it seeks, and in one supreme thought is fused and transformed. The soul's complete conformity to the Object of its adoration—such is the inner meaning, the driving impulse, of these sublime prayers, the secret of which remains hidden in the hearts of the saints, while we can only see the effects. By every possible means, some of which we know of and some of which we know not, the soul seeks to enter the Invisible Kingdom. At length a means of communication is found, an opening is made in the encircling walls, and the soul precipitates itself, trembling with rapture, towards the clearer knowledge of God, toward the joy of His power and of His perfection. Do visions then come? It is of little consequence. Mystical graces are not given to every saint, and even among these graces are some which do not appear to materialise, or to manifest themselves by apparitions or revelations; they leave the soul overwhelmed as it were, but still passive. Other graces seem to lead the spirit to scenes external to itself, whereupon a whole series of visions may be thrown open to its gaze. But just as the gift of miracles is merely an incidental attribute of sanctity—sometimes a blessing, sometimes a danger—so with the gift of visions; it is in no way essential; and underneath all, in the very depths of the soul, burns the glow, the flame, which is the very centre-point and origin of all holiness, and which, like an unquenchable fire, serves an infinity of purposes. In the spiritual world, all is obscure; but the ardour resulting from love explains all sanctity, and, if one may so express it, gives a measure of its mysterious heights.

With regard to "vocal," as distinguished from "mental" prayer, Colette made much use of the Breviary, more especially of the Psalms. Often, during the evening, she used the verses of the Psalms as a text in preparing for her nightly adoration—for a meditation which lasted till dawn. Whenever she said the Penitential Psalms, she applied the sentiments to herself with such earnestness that she wept profusely. Every day she recited the whole Divine Office, as it is said by priests. One of her minor devotions was the frequent recitation of three Hail Marys, against the three great sins of the world.\* She also loved to say her "*paternosters*," that is to say, some form of rosary.

She hears Mass daily ; no matter where she is, she asks to have it celebrated in her presence, often hearing two or three. What she prefers is a "private" Mass, with no one near except her closest friends. Unable to control her emotion while it is being offered, it pains her to be watched by strangers. During the Holy Sacrifices, her rapturous delight, her tears, her frequent ecstasies all betray her. When the moment of the Elevation comes, she sighs and weeps, she moans, she trembles with anguish. So vividly does she manifest her realisation of the Divine Presence, that the onlookers can form some idea as to what a lively faith in the Blessed Sacrament may mean. They themselves are often inspired with somewhat similar emotions ; they are given a glimpse of an Unseen Power, they feel that, in very truth, "the Lord is in this place."

When Mass is over, Colette remains for a long time oblivious to all things earthly. When spoken to she hears

\* "Concupiscence of the mind, concupiscence of the flesh, pride of life.

nothing ; her expression is transfigured, remote ; her mind completely absorbed.

People who heard of these marvels were naturally anxious to see them. Colette knew this, and had a perfect horror of this curiosity. If anyone asked for the privilege of being present at a Mass which she was attending, she never granted it unless satisfied that they were really holy, really advanced in spirituality. Sometimes, however, inquisitive people hid themselves near her oratory, hoping to see her behind the grating, or at least to hear her sighs and involuntary utterances. But their presence was always quickly detected by Colette, who used to call her confessor or some trusted sister, and ask them to remove those who were trying to take her unawares. It distressed her not to be allowed to adore her Lord in peace. When asked why she wept so abundantly, she answered very simply that " to do otherwise was impossible for her."

Contrary to the custom of those times, and somewhat to the surprise of her contemporaries, she received Holy Communion very frequently, and during one whole year she received it daily. At each of her Communions, the mystery of the Eucharist assumes afresh its tragic significance ; it is to her as new, as wonderful a miracle as if accomplished for the first time. When about to receive the Body of Christ, she cries out that she does not deserve this favour, she is overcome with a sense of her own unworthiness, she declares that she is not fit to associate with the worst of sinners, that she is " vile, unclean, abominable " ; that she has sinned against the Majesty of God. " It seems," writes Pierre de Vaux, " as if her two beautiful eyes are two living and overflowing foun-



tains of tears, which she sheds not as descending drop by drop, but like little rivulets, from the abundance of which she is all soaked and bathed." "She moaned like a person in great pain, or like one condemned to death. But immediately that she had received very humbly and reverently the Body of Our Lord, she was all enraptured and transfigured, and remained in this state without moving, as if she was in a trance. And when she returned to herself, sometimes her face was like an angel's, so beautiful and bright that it was a great pleasure and comfort to see her and look at her, and she was, as it were, all heavenly, and a stranger to terrestrial things."

Like many others at the time, she was possessed with a great longing to see Jerusalem. From year to year she was hoping to be able to visit the Holy Land, but this long journey never became possible for her. One can easily understand this desire, this anxiety to follow the traces—the only earthly traces—of the Being who to know, even imperfectly, was the dominating idea of her life. The anniversary of Christ's sufferings was always for her a time of mourning.\*

"Who could fully relate," says Pierre de Vaux, "the abundance of tears, the piteous weeping and agonising

\* Involuntarily, the analogy with human sentiments here comes before one's mind. Is not all love the same? After the death of a beloved one, is not a whole life often centred round the dates and places connected with that dear one's life; and in the same way, a heart filled with adoration for Our Lord is happy or sorrowful on the recurring anniversaries of His life on earth. It is true that this Being passed from earth many centuries ago, and that we have never seen Him, but a love of this kind comes from faith, that mysterious and marvellous element of religion which makes present and actual the distant and the past.

moans which she poured forth during Holy Week, when she was calling to her remembrance the excessive sufferings of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ? She cried and lamented so mournfully that there was no heart, no matter how hard, which was not moved to pity. For a long time she remained so inflamed and aglow from this that no matter by what means it was recalled to her mind, her attention became so detached from all occupations that she neither understood or thought of anything else." \*

Often her contemplation is of so intense a nature that it leaves on her even material traces. "One time, on a Friday, at the hour of Matins, she set herself to meditate on the grievous pain that Our Lord had suffered, and during this meditation she endured such great torments that the sisters, who were coming out from Chapter, meeting her, looked at her in great amazement. For it seemed as if her beloved face had been beaten with sticks, and there remained only the skin and the bone, which appeared all bruised." As soon as she had spoken to the sisters, she perceived that there must be something unusual about her appearance, so she hastily retreated to her oratory, where she remained lost in ecstasy until six o'clock in the evening.

During these periods of contemplation, which lasted sometimes for hours, sometimes for days, she neither ate nor drank nor slept. She completely lost all sensation. At the convent of Seurre, she one time fell into a rapture while going to confession. The confessor thought that she was dead, and he came and rang at the "Black Tower." The sisters hurried to Colette, and one of them

\* P. de Vaux, p. 89.

bit her toe—so strongly that the marks remained, but it did not arouse her.

Another time, on the eve of the Feast of St. Peter's Chains, as the first bell for vespers was ringing, she suddenly said: "Now I am leaving my enclosure" (*reclusage*) and fell into an ecstasy until it was nearly evening. At times her colour kept changing, sometimes in one way, sometimes another." The nuns, seeing their Mother in this state, were often terrified; when she came back to her ordinary senses it was necessary, in order to revive her, to bathe her hands and feet in cold water. One day among many others, they were so frightened that they sent for the doctor. He was called Maître Picotel. For a few moments he studied the ecstatic nun, and understood that this matter did not come within his province. Pointing to Colette, he said to the sisters: "God is her physician," and, taking off his hat, he went piously on his knees twice. When leaving, he said to the nuns: "You are very happy in having such a Mother!"

What she saw during these ecstasies she never revealed. Some of the saints who had wonderful visions have described something of their revelations, according to their power of expressing themselves, their ideas, their talents, the times in which they lived. As Colette wrote nothing of her experiences and spoke of them very little, we do not know except by chance and in a remote way what these divine illuminations meant for her. An occasional word to some of her intimate friends is all that has come down to us. She showed them a large ring of virgin gold which was placed on her finger by St. John the Evangelist. She had also a cross of pearls and gold, which she called her "heaven-sent cross" (*croix du ciel*), the origin of

which is equally mysterious. She brought back from her spiritual communications a form of prayer, still faithfully preserved by the Poor Clares, and known as the prayer of St. Colette. Here it is, in the Latin text as given by Colette herself :

“Benedicatur hora qua Deus et Homo natus est, et Spiritus sanctus de quo conceptus est; et illa Virgo gloriosissima Maria, de quâ natus est, sit benedicta; et per illam Virginem Mariam de qua Deus et Homo natus est per illam sacratissimam horam in quâ natus est, exaudiantur preces meae et impleantur omne desiderium meum in bonum. Jesu pie et bone, noli me propter peccata mea derelinquere, neque vindictam de peccatis meis sumere; sed exaudi me et imple desiderium meum in bonum propter gloriam nominis tui. Amen.”\*

Her joy is another form of evidence—that overflowing joy which, on her return from her long prayers, seems to radiate from and transform her, causing her to speak to those around her in language which praises God in a veritable torrent of burning eloquence; that joy which impels her to occasional half-confidences to her intimate friends, in the midst of which she checks herself, abashed at the thought of revealing the secret of her privileges; and

\* The following is an authorised translation of this prayer :—

Blessed be the hour in which the God-Man was born; blessed be the Holy Ghost, of whom He was conceived; blessed be the glorious Virgin Mary of whom He was born! Through that blessed Virgin Mary, who was the Mother of God made man, and through that sacred hour in which He entered the world, may all my prayers be mercifully heard and my desires for all that is good be granted. O loving Jesus, O merciful Jesus, do not forsake me because of my sins, do not punish me for my sins, but graciously hear me and grant me the blessings I ask, to the praise and glory of Thy Holy Name. Amen.

which she will only explain, as if reluctantly, in some such terms as these : " It seemed to me that I was so near heaven, that by stretching out my arms, I could have touched it."



As may easily be imagined, her nuns were lost in admiration at these various marks of sanctity ; and with the intense love of the marvellous which prevailed at that age, they added to and multiplied all these wonders, telling sometimes of things which they had seen, but often giving full rein to their imaginations. We find one of them declaring that the Mother's cell is " all aglow with fires " ; another, that she has seen " a bright sun coming from her mouth " ; while, with another it is " a flaming torch." All these fancies have just this point of interest that they place for us Colette in her real surroundings and atmosphere. We see the reverence with which she was regarded by her friends and indeed by all who came near her. They really believed that nothing was impossible to her ; marvels and prodigies seemed to them quite a matter of course if she was their cause or their object.

Of course this extreme credulity is embarrassing for the historian who, coming many centuries later, is desirous of faithfully depicting a figure whose clear and forceful outlines have become blurred, so to speak, by these innumerable anecdotes. One would like to sweep them aside altogether, or at least to clear away those which seem least authentic. Nevertheless, if a quantity of legendary lore has grown up around Colette, and if the wonders concerning her have been multiplied, does not the very copiousness of these tales show that wonders must have existed ? And if a sort of miraculous atmos-

phere seems to envelope Colette, is it not because the number of these miracles caused a genuine amazement among her contemporaries, and because those that are added on are merely an amplification of those which really happened? But in simple truth and reality, her powers seem to have been extraordinary. In any case, when relating some of her miracles, we shall rely on critics more expert than ourselves as well as less remote from her in point of time. The processes of beatification and of canonisation have retained—evidently as being the best authenticated—a certain number of remarkable events; and, on the other hand, the Bollandists mention the greater number of those related by Pierre de Vaux, Sœur Perrine, and the witnesses examined after the death of the Saint.

While restricting ourselves, therefore, to those miraculous deeds which have thus been authenticated, one cannot help being amazed both at their striking nature and at the facility, so to speak, with which Colette used her strange powers. It might be said that her daily life became a network of wonders, the working of which is at her pleasure; that a word or a gesture from her can accomplish anything she wishes. Let us repeat that sanctity can exist without miracles; that miracles are merely one result of sanctity, and are by no means an assurance of it. In former times, they possessed a fascination, a prestige, much greater than they do to-day. But admitting all this, one may still admire the strong faith which carries with it such ascendancy, such daring, such facility, in that unknown world between heaven and earth where things that are "possible" are suddenly supplemented by things that we had thought "impossible"—that world which by derogations from its own



laws manifests its strange and mysterious existence. Colette, we may believe, ventured into this supernatural domain with the simplicity and self-abnegation which we know characterised all her doings ; she claimed no merit for herself and always asserted that in exercising her remarkable gifts she was merely an intermediary and an instrument in God's hands.

Among these special gifts one of the first of which we hear is an insight into the human heart astonishing by its penetration and accuracy. Several times already, during the course of this history, we have heard of her reading at a glance the state of a soul or its thoughts. It would really seem as if she could always know, at any time that she wished, all that was transpiring in the souls of those who were directly in her charge. They, in their turn, are sometimes frightened, and think this a very terrifying kind of power ; sometimes, on the other hand, it makes them very happy. One of her nuns being in great trouble, Colette, who had been told nothing about it, speaks to her of this trouble and tenderly consoles her. A young novice, tormented by discouragement and doubt, was in a state of great distress ; although she had never mentioned this to anyone, Colette called her one day, and speaking as if she knew of all her trouble, impressed on her the great mercy of God. One day she sends for two of her nuns, and when they come to her oratory, desires them to become reconciled with each other. Both were under the impression that their quarrel was quite unknown to anyone, but for some days past each had felt extremely angry with the other. Another time, being in choir during the office, she sends one of the nuns to say to one who is some distance away : " The Mother tells you

not to think any more about what you are thinking of now." At another time it is the nun beside her during Office whose thoughts are wandering in unbecoming directions. Colette and she are so close together that they are following the words in the same book. Twice does the Abbess make a sign to her that she should chase away these thoughts; but the nun, completely absorbed in them, does not understand, until Colette abruptly pulls the book out of her hands; the nun looks at her, understands at last, and blushes deeply. Another sister, also during the Office, begins to recall with pleasure the time she spent in the world. Colette, at a distance, gazes at her. The nun shakes off her distractions, and gives her mind to the Office; she then sees the Mother smiling amicably. But when leaving the church, Colette stops her and reproves her sharply. "I saw you well," she says. "And I would see you just as well outside the convent as inside."

One day a prince who had come to visit Colette with a numerous suite, "a very noble and powerful prince," we are told, began to indulge in worldly thoughts while the lives of the saints were being read to him. Instead of listening, he was indulging in depraved fancies while preserving an external appearance of devout attention. Colette kept looking at him for a while, hoping to turn away his thoughts by the force of her will. But it was no use, and renouncing the attempt, she gave a cry, a cry of disgust and indignation. The prince's companions and the others who were present could not understand what had happened. But he himself, full of confusion, recalled his thoughts, and was afterwards convinced that she had clearly seen what was in his mind.

This extraordinary insight into hearts and consciences is often an inconvenience and worry to her, for after one good look at a person, even one she does not know, she is enlightened both as to the state of his health and of his soul ; and it often happens that more or less against her will, she exhorts people apparently in good health not to forget death, because she believes them to be threatened by it before long. Over and over again she tells her intimate friends that she is distressed by " this knowledge that God has given me of the doings of others." We may remember in our own time the clear-sighted penetration of Blessed Jean Vianney, the Curé of Ars, in order to understand these great seers of whom Colette is one. And, as in the case of the curé, her foresight and her prophecies serve only towards spiritual ends. In purely material concerns, Colette is as unenlightened and as much in the dark as anyone else. But when there is question of helping a soul, she can see into hearts, she can read the future.

A young widow comes to her to explain that she is thinking of marrying again, so that she may have children to inherit a great property which she desires to keep. Colette tells her that she can re-marry if she wishes, but that she will never have a child.

Several persons having no idea of their approaching death, are warned by her that they will not live long ; among others, Jean de Coulonges, a citizen of Seurre ; an ambitious bishop who has made up his mind to go to Rome to obtain a cardinal's hat, and who presently dies there ; Jean de Molines, Chaplain of Jacques de Bourbon ; a young woman named Jeanne de Vannoz who lived in Poligny, and the parents of a very young child, of whom

she predicted that if he were not taken from this world at an early age, he would do nothing but evil. The child, full of life while on her lap, died shortly after being brought back to his parents' house.

One day while breakfasting with her nuns, she declared that nine future abbesses were sitting at the table. This prediction was fulfilled, partly before her death, partly afterwards.\*

On one occasion a tall, handsome young girl came to offer herself as a novice, earnestly begging to be admitted, and manifesting in every way the greatest goodwill; in spite of which Colette was most unwilling to receive her. The other nuns, however, urged her so strongly that at last she reluctantly yielded, saying to them: "You compel me by your requests to receive her, but I tell you that she will never be a professed religious." In a very short time the young girl became full of impatience to return to the world, and left the convent.

One day a rumour was circulated in the neighbourhood where Colette happened to be staying, that the ruler of the country, while fighting on some distant battlefield, had been defeated and taken prisoner. (It is probable that the story relates to the Duke of Burgundy.) The news, brought by some nobles to the church dignitaries of the town, spread quickly, and everyone was in a state of consternation. Some gentlemen who were passing through

\* According to Sœur Perrine, the names of these nine Abbesses were: Sœur Claire, Abbess of Vevey; Sœur Jehanne, of Lons-le-Saunier, Abbess of Auxonne; Sœur Agnes Wisemelle, Abbess of Seurre; Sœur Estienne de Tart, Abbess of Vevey; Sœur Marie de Pois, Abbess of three convents in succession; Sœur Jehanne de Corbie, Abbess of Aigueperse; Sœur Marie Harenguière, Abbess of Moulins, and Sœur Huguette du Tart, Abbess of Hesdin.

the town and who knew how much Colette esteemed the prince in question, called to tell her the disquieting news. But Colette refused to believe it: "My lords," she said to them reassuringly, "I beg of you not to pay any attention to these reports, because what you have been told did not occur at all." They replied that they had heard the news from a trustworthy source—from people who themselves had seen the prince taken prisoner. She shook her head, quite unconvinced, and her last words to them were: "I give you my word that your lord is at present in such a part of his dominions, where he is enjoying himself, free from all trouble and danger. Before ten days you will have accurate news of him." And so it happened. The alarm was a false one.

Those who know her well seem to retain such a vivid impression that the mere thought of her is often sufficient to turn them from evil, as in the curious story told by Pierre de Vaux. In a family with whom she was on very friendly terms, the mother was in great trouble over her children, fearing a grave scandal in the household. We are not given details, except that the mother, being in daily apprehension of evil, sent a messenger to Colette begging her to come to her assistance. Colette did not come herself, but sent by the messenger the girdle of her robe. We may be certain that she also offered those fervent prayers, those admonitions from soul to soul, which bend the stubborn will, and the secret of which Colette understood so well. The young man in question was present when the messenger arrived with Colette's reply, and he was immediately transformed. Filled with horror at the temptation to which he had almost yielded, he thenceforward avoided by every means in his power the person

who had attracted his attention. She, soon afterwards, was happily married, and peace was restored to the family.

Alone in her oratory during her night-watch of prayer, her heart is ever watching over her distant convents, seeking to divine whether grace reigns supreme or has been forfeited by any of their inmates. Her thoughts travel from monastery to monastery, dwelling sometimes on one of her friars, sometimes on one of her nuns. Many of her close friends, knowing her special power against the demon of impurity, are in the habit of recommending themselves to her prayers, and her vigilant care sustains and assists them from afar in times of weakness. They sometimes believe that this Mother who knows everything can see them in some mysterious manner, no matter how far away she is. We see an example of this in the priest who having fallen into sin secretly in Rome, was reproached by Colette on his return home, and who ever afterwards believed that she could see him no matter where he was.

But farther and farther still, across that measureless void which is not of this earth, she follows the souls of her spiritual children, for she sees them even beyond the tomb. Colette was ever full of pious zeal in all that concerned the dying ; of all works of charity, she holds most sacred that of being present during the last hours of those whom she loves or who have need of her. If the dying person is one of her nuns, she stays with her in the infirmary ; if a friar, she has him brought as close as possible to the wicket of the cloister. There, never leaving until the last moments are over, she consoles and encourages the departing soul ; she adjures him to remain steadfast in the Catholic faith ; she repeats aloud for him her own



impassioned prayers, she reveals the burning ardour of her soul in order to strengthen the soul which is weary and suffering ; and on its behalf she struggles with the attacks of the demon.

Among her nuns was one whose profession she had sanctioned against the advice of the other sisters, knowing that if this young girl remained in the world, her salvation would be endangered. This nun subsequently fell " into a mortal illness, so much so that she lost her speech. The father confessor of the convent was sent for, but this was useless, as the said good father could do nothing, on account of her having lost her speech, for which reason he departed in much distress, because she could not go to confession." Colette, already uneasy on behalf of this somewhat unsettled soul, had previously asked of the Lord to let her know for what length of time she would remain in His grace, and had received an answer, that she would be safe as long as she was obedient. So Colette, having been told of the nun's grave condition, " came in haste to the infirmary, to the bed of the invalid and called her two or three times : ' Marie, speak to me.' And immediately the said invalid turned towards her and spoke to her clearly. And then related to her all her life and afterwards made a devout confession ; and our Mother then went back to her oratory. But she directed that she should be called when the said invalid should be going to Our Lord, and this was done, for, when the agony of death came on her, our glorious Mother was called. She came, and lay down on the invalid's bed, weeping a great deal, and did not cease until the invalid had given up her soul to God. Then our glorious Mother rejoiced while praising Our Lord and said : ' She is freed

from great suffering. She is on the path of salvation.' ”

All Colette's most striking characteristics come out in this scene—her compassionate tenderness, her anxious care while watching beside a soul at the last great hour, her wholehearted dedication of herself, as if she hoped to throw herself into the balance between good and evil ; and, finally, her certainty of this soul's salvation and the joy this gave her. Every day, by her special direction, the Office of the Dead is recited by the community for the sisters departed. Many of those whom she loves and who are far away from her at the time of their death, appear to her, coming themselves to let her know when they have crossed the dark river. We hear, among other incidents, of one friar who had very special confidence in her and who died while far away. He had never been very devout. She knew, not alone the time he died, but also that he was suffering a great deal, from which suffering he would later on be freed. And for a long time she prayed and did works of penance for him.

There was a man named Hanequin, a citizen of Besançon, who had allowed his daughter to join Colette's Order, and who himself had a great reputation for piety ; he asserted that he had visions, and even travelled from Franche-Comté to Savoy in order to give Colette a full account of them. When he died, his spirit appeared to her, but not in peace ; it was a terrifying apparition, accompanied by “ great noise and clankings.”

A friar named Jean Croquoison, of the convent of Hesdin, in Flanders, came to see Colette, who was then at Besançon. As soon as he arrived, Colette said to him : “ Katherine Amette, of Ghent, one of the community at

Hesdin, has died since you left. She said to me, 'Mother, pray for me; I have just died.' "

Sometimes, when she was with her nuns, working or conversing, she would stop suddenly and say: "Such a one has died. I must go and say my Paternosters for her." Her former confessor, Père Jehan Pinet, who had had such a happy and far-reaching influence on her life, used to appear to her every year, on the anniversary of his death.

A friar, Guillaume Turéal, appeared as a white phantom, quite close to her grille, a year after his death. She recognised him and said: "Here is Frère Guillaume." Very often these visits made her shudder with fear; for instance, those she received for seven years in succession from that great Abbot of Corbie, Dom Raoul de Roye, who had taken so little trouble to protect her, and who, perhaps, was too much attached to the good things of this world. His appearance was always heralded by a great rattling of chains; and Colette, herself trembling with fear, used to say to her nuns: "Go away at once; here comes that abbot!"

On one occasion at Besançon Colette required the presence of five or six sisters who were then at Auxonne, and she asked Père Henri to go with Sister Perrine to escort them. They had scarcely set out on their journey, when Jehanne de Joue, one of the nuns whom they were to bring back, died. When Père Henri returned, with one nun less than had been arranged for, he said to Colette in the presence of Perrine: "That sister is dead. I recommend her to your prayers." Colette replied: "My good Father, she came to me more quickly than you have done; for I heard her call me three times: "Mother Mother, I have come as you desired.' And I made a sign to her to keep silence, thinking it was a different

person who spoke. But I turned round, and perceived her, and I saw her as white as snow, and recognised her quite well."



We already know that Colette spent the greater part of her nights in prayer, in animated prayer; in fervent meditation, in colloquies with God, wherein her utterances were frequently interrupted by her tears, her visions and ecstasies. One evening one of her nuns made up her mind to watch near her in secret; most probably she hid herself in the chapel, from which there was always an opening into Colette's little oratory—the tiny cell where she spent her life. During this long night of prayer, this nun heard these simple words, repeated over and over again: "Lord, who art Thou, and who am I?" What an admirable theme for meditation, equally suited to the most learned theologian and to the humblest worker! It contains the very essence of religion, as a mountain spring contains the stream that becomes a mighty river. And in these words we find Colette's great mind and heart—direct, transparent, free from all pettiness. But all her nights were not as peaceful as this, for she was often visited by demons. Standing, like all mystics, on a plane above the normal world, she enjoys on the one hand the special friendship of God, and on the other, she incurs the wrath of an adversary. Along with sublime revelations and the delights of the All-Perfect, come the powers of the Evil One. Here, again, in order that we may better understand these matters, let us remember the demoniacal persecutions endured by the Curé d'Ars.

How she detests this spirit of evil whom she calls the Enemy! Those who love deeply usually hate deeply as

well, and in Colette's eyes God had an enemy, who could not attack God Himself, but who disturbed God's image in the souls of men and induced them to break God's laws. How, then, could she fail to detest this enemy? From him she suffered innumerable temptations; of these we only know a part, and probably by no means the most terrible part. And she has other struggles with him also, actual physical struggles, which she doubtless feared less, but which nevertheless must have been very terrifying. She suffered all her life in this way, being quite young when the demons began to persecute her. Thus, for many years, when she went at night to pray, there came beside her "*un esprit dolent*," a mournful spirit who groaned and sighed in order to excite her compassion and to distract her from her prayers. Colette acted as if she heard nothing, until at last the disturber became silent. At other times she was brutally beaten, the marks of the blows being visible next day on her body. Colette braced herself to endure all this, certain that she would be given sufficient strength to endure. But the demons became more and more determined. One night they attacked her under the form of foxes—one of the "evil-smelling beasts" reputed specially odious in the Middle Ages—and she had to struggle against them in the darkness until morning, when the sisters found her completely exhausted. "It seemed," said Sœur Perrine, "as if a great number of the demons held council and took advice together in order to invent various forms of malice and of clever devices in order to place every obstacle that they could in the way of her pious undertakings; and they worked hard in order to fill her with extreme anxiety and terror."

But in this they never succeeded. One day Colette asked a young sister whether it would terrify her very much if she were to see demons. The nun replied that she would certainly die of fright. Colette then told her that she herself would never be frightened at them—not if all the demons of hell were gathered in her presence ; because, she explained, they have really no power over human beings “except such as God gives them :” that at all times and places, night or day, alone or with others, she always felt sufficient courage to face them, and feared them not at all, “even though they often showed themselves to her in horrible shapes, sometimes in the form of men red in colour, or of men of hideous appearance, and so tall that it seemed as if the head of the demon was touching the sky, while his two legs were one each side of the convent.”

He appeared to her one day under the form of an enormous dragon, and when going away sprang with one bound over the walls of the monastery. He frequently persecuted her under the appearance of loathsome creatures, such as snakes, toads, and slugs, which came swarming all over her cell, subsequently disappearing as suddenly as they had come. One night a huge demon came beside her when she was reading her prayers. He blew out her little lamp : she relit it ; it went out again : he began jeering at her and at last upset it, spilling the oil all over her psalter. Sometimes the demons enacted hideous scenes before her ; one night for instance, in mockery of her charity towards the dying, they brought in the body of a criminal, which had been left hanging on the gallows as a warning to the public. This horrible incident has frequently figured in pictures representing



the apparitions of the demons to Colette ; it appealed strongly to the popular imagination. The saint is depicted at her prayers, while Satan, at the end of her oratory, shows her two bodies hanging from a gibbet.

On one occasion in particular, as if wild with rage against this brave and unconquerable woman, they attacked her with special ferocity, and in large numbers. They struck her with sticks, and threw her on the ground, and concluded by crushing her into the window of her oratory, where she was jammed so tightly that she could neither move or speak, in fact hardly breathe. There she remained until the morning, when the sisters found her in this situation, so firmly fixed into the window that none of them was able to release her. They were obliged to call in a carpenter—a lay brother in the friars' monastery, who had to saw through a bar of the window frame in order to free her.

Some of these diabolical manifestations took place in the presence of witnesses. The nuns could not bear to look on, unless Colette was in their midst to give them courage. One of them, however, was so distressed at the thought of the persecution which Colette had to endure, that she determined to try and protect her and secure for her some free respite from suffering and some of the repose she so badly needed. So during the night she remained beside Colette, endeavouring to defend this poor Mother, so weighed down with responsibilities and troubles, and now growing old. When the demons came rushing into the cell, she held out her arms in front of Colette and said to them : " Come, attack me and leave my Mother alone." There were so many of them that she had brought in a little branch from a tree, with which she swept them out as with a broom !

One day Colette was anxious that her father confessor should see with his own eyes these "horrible figures." Twice he endured this spectacle, and afterwards declared that he would have lost his reason were it not for the presence of Colette. Hideous beasts, watching Colette with intent eyes, displayed themselves on the ceiling and sides of the room, remaining motionless for a while; then beginning to descend the walls, very slowly, and still keeping some distance away, at the end of the oratory; and finally coming nearer and nearer, while appearing to increase in number; there was then a sudden rush, and they had her surrounded in spite of her attempts to ward them off, coming creeping over her limbs, her arms, her face, even her eyes. For several hours in succession, she was struck and bruised all over, and even her eyes, on which she set so much value, felt as if they had been burned by contact with these horrors, so that she believed that she would certainly lose them.



Such is the setting, sometimes radiantly bright, sometimes fearfully sombre, of marvellous phenomena, in which Colette lived and moved. And the glimpse we get of this strange world leaves us all the more amazed at her clear-sighted good sense and her practical activities. One of the most striking things about real saints is that their mysticism does not impair their judgment, their powers of decision, their appreciation of life's realities. In Colette's case this is all the more surprising, when we remember that besides the atmosphere of marvels just described, there was also the extraordinary environment created by her miracles. These miracles were so very numerous and of such different kinds—some very striking,

some very homely—that it would be quite impossible to describe them all. It seemed as if Colette, like some other saints, was able to make use of the divine power whenever she wished ; and that she did actually so make use of it, sometimes in grave and urgent cases, sometimes in very simple troubles and difficulties. She seemed to possess the secrets of health and of illness, and to utilise this knowledge in a constant outpouring of charity, knowing that all such graces and favours help to glorify God, that all these marvels redound to His honour, and, in this spirit devoting herself wholeheartedly to her work as His intermediary.

In this spirit therefore we find her on several occasions acting as arbiter of life and death. The raising of the dead to life is the greatest of all miracles—one which impresses us so much that we place the under-worker who achieves it far above all others. Very few women have possessed this extraordinary power. St. Colette is said to have restored life to four people.

The first of these was the little still-born child, brought to life at Besançon by the prayers of the saint, an incident already described in relating that part of Colette's life. The second case was that of Jehan Boisot, a boy of fifteen years, who, like the young man of Naïm, had already been placed on his bier when Colette was asked to bring him back to life. She commanded him to arise, and he did arise. He lived to be very old, always showing himself a great benefactor to the Poor Clares in his town ; and it was he himself who gave evidence concerning his own resurrection, at the opening of the processes of Colette's beatification.

She worked a similar miracle in favour of a friar named

François Claret, one of her most special friends and a great upholder of her reform, who worked side by side with her for thirty years and survived her. It was during this long period of helpfulness that he fell ill and died. All who saw him were certain he was dead. Colette was not present at the time, but on hearing of this great misfortune, she implored God to restore him to her. He came back to life quite suddenly, and lived for a long time afterwards. He himself always believed that he had been dead and used to relate how he had walked about Heaven, in the company of the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors and the virgins, all of whom agreed that he should be given back to "*la Mere Colette*," who was praying so earnestly for him on earth. He was fond of relating his experiences, and Perrine tells us that she heard the story several times from his own lips. Colette had great confidence in him, and he made hundreds of journeys in the interests of the Order, or in order to carry messages from one convent to the other.

There was another still-born infant which owed its life to Colette—a frail existence which only lasted for six months, but which at all events enabled the child to receive the baptism of which it would otherwise have been deprived. This was one of Colette's most disinterested interventions, as she was stirred to compassion simply by the grief of the parents. The little body had already been buried before there was any suggestion of trying to obtain a miracle. It was exhumed, and Colette took it on her knees, rocked it in her arms, warmed it; and when it came back to life she handed it back to its mother.

Of these four people, brought from death to life,

two were still living when Sœur Perrine wrote the life of the saint, and she knew them both. Even if we assume that François Claret may have been in a state of lethargy and not really dead, even if we eliminate altogether this one doubtful case, three indubitable resurrections still remain. Several others are, as a matter of fact, attributed to Colette, all of still-born children. But we wish to restrict our narrative to miracles of which the authenticity is beyond question.

In those times, the most dreaded of all scourges was the plague. It would seem that there were neither remedies to cure it nor means of preventing it from spreading. One of Colette's friars, having stayed for some time in a town where this pestilence was raging, was stricken down on his return. It would seem that Colette was then at Lézignan and it was there that the poor Franciscan was nursed. It soon became apparent that he was grievously ill—so virulently infected indeed that his speedy death was expected by everyone. Two physicians were passing through the town,—very learned men, coming from Montpellier on their way to visit an illustrious prince who needed their skill. Knowing that Colette was in the town, they went to the convent to see her, and; as might be expected, the abbess asked for their advice regarding the poor fever-stricken patient. Both of them declared without any reservation that he would die that same day. Probably neither of them was very religious, for it would seem that Colette wished to teach them a lesson. To their positive opinion, she demurred somewhat.

“After all,” she said, “God is greater than the laws of nature.”

“ Very true,” said the doctors, “ but if God does not intervene in some very special way, it is not possible, according to nature, that this man should live.”

Colette asked God to “ intervene in some special way,” doubtless to prove His power to the sceptics who had just left. And the monk recovered from the pestilence. But the two medical men had caught it at his bedside ; and one of them died. The other, who, we are told, was the senior member of the Faculty of Montpellier, had ever afterwards a very great reverence for Colette.

There is also attributed to her a curious miracle, known to us by tradition rather than by any documentary evidences. It is embodied in one of the most popular legends concerning Colette ; and although not related by either Perrine or Pierre de Vaux, is retained by the Bollandist historians : so that, it is only right that it should be included, with reservations, in a faithful narrative of Colette’s life.

The incident took place at Poligny, a short time after the foundation of the monastery there. One of the nuns had just died. Colette was then at Besançon. As often happened, she received a supernatural intimation of this death, and was also made aware that this nun had died in a state of mortal sin and would be damned if she did not get some assistance. Colette felt convinced that such a revelation would not be made to her without some special purpose, and that God might consent to suspend his judgment in some way if she intervened. She set out, sending a messenger in advance in all haste, directing that the interment should not take place till she arrived.



She was accompanied by two people, Père Henri and Mother de Toulangeon.\*

As may well be imagined, everyone not only in Poligny but also for miles around, began to proclaim a miracle beforehand, and came thronging around the convent in order to be present at it. When Colette arrived, she had the chapel and its environs cleared of the crowd, and then desired that the funeral service should begin. The nun was on an open bier, in the choir of the chapel. Colette went away to pray. When she returned she approached the dead woman, and took her by the hand. Whereupon the nun arose from her bier. It would seem as if the actual moment of death had been prolonged, and that she had remained in a state of suspended animation, but approximating more closely to death than to life. Père Henri heard her confession, she received Colette's blessing and was then put back on her funeral couch, and this time death really claimed her.

This intervention could hardly be called a resurrection ; but there must have been some prolongation of that supreme moment when the conscience of a dying person is still alert, while the whole being is sinking into the weakness of death. After this strange and striking intervention, Colette herself must have feared that she might yield to pride, says the chronicle, and she retired to her cell, much embarrassed, seeming almost annoyed, and prayed there for hours. She refused to admit anyone, and it would seem as if she wished to expiate, by humble prayer and penance, her use of supernatural powers.

\* If this event really took place, it is very probable that it was Père Henri's missing narrative which made it generally known. It is related in all the biographies of the saint.

Innumerable miracles are recounted in the story of her daily life ; she multiplies the provisions of a necessitous convent, averts the danger of death from expectant mothers, frees demoniacs ; above all, she heals the sick. So that, in conformity with the invariable ambitions of the saints, she imitates Jesus Christ, her model and theirs. She cures cases of paralysis, of ulcers, of fever ; even the unhappy lepers, the "*méselles*"\* condemned to perpetual isolation ; women with repulsive diseases, whom no one dares to touch, whom no one will attend. She cures one poor woman of a cancer of the face, by spraying over her face some water which she had taken into her own mouth. A sister who was suffering from a running sore in her hand asked the Mother, of her charity, to place her finger in the wound, which was immediately healed. Another sister was cured by her in secret, and only after the invalid had assured her that she was anxious to be restored to health. This nun was very ill and suffered a great deal. During the night, when she was quite alone in the infirmary, Colette came to her, and after sympathising with her, said : " You do not wish to die for another while ? " The nun replied that she would like very much to live. " Very well," said Colette, " you will live, you will not die this time." And so it happened.

One day when passing by some nuns whom she did not know, she saw one of them, a very young girl, get a sudden attack of hæmorrhage from the lungs. So distressed was Colette at the sight that she stopped at once, saying anxiously : " My poor child, what is the matter with you ? It is my will that you shall not have this illness again." The young nun never suffered in this way afterwards.

Colette, however, disliked very much that even a share

\* From Lat. "*misellus*" : wretched, miserable.

in these cures should be attributed to her. She always said that all extraordinary graces came, on the one hand from God, and on the other from the faith of those who were affected. It was this faith, and it alone, said Colette, which induced God to intervene. If she had been able to express herself in the modern language of science, she would have said that God and the faith of the believer were the two opposite poles of the miracles, and that, as for herself, she simply put the two poles into contact. She conducted the prayer towards the divine source of power. When the faith of those praying is not sufficient, Colette can obtain nothing. Watch her, for example, near the epileptic who has no faith : she rebukes her, urges her. " My child, for want of faith, your illness continues. I beg of you to have faith in Our Lord, and I have a firm hope that you will be cured." And if the patient, when cured, attributed this favour to the prayers of the saint, she was much annoyed, and sometimes caused the disease to return, as a proof that it was not she who had removed it ; she used then to command the invalid to go a pilgrimage, after which a permanent cure would be effected.

But this humility of Colette's did not always succeed in its object. We must, of course, admire her extreme reserve and reticence, her dislike of ostentation, the prudence and candour which she invariably displayed. But how could her contemporaries avoid showing their gratitude for benefits to a holy woman who scattered these favours everywhere as she went along ? So that each successive year saw Colette more and more highly revered, and her circles of admirers increased ; while her renown as a saint shone ever more and more brightly.

## VI.

### OLD AGE AND DEATH. (1439-1447).

PÈRE Henri de la Baume died in February 1439 ; and to Colette the loss of the friend who had guided and sustained her whole life's work, meant the beginning of the end. Old age was approaching—that period of diminishing energy when the powers of the soul are lessened according as bodily health declines ; when the passing away of the companions of one's best years creates a solitude which nothing else can fill, when the heart is more often sad with the unalterable sadness of all things which are fading away. Colette was at this time fifty-eight years old. This winter was spent by her at Besançon. During the Lent immediately following the death of Père Henri her visions were more striking and realistic than ever. Christ showed himself to her (whether by the eyes of the soul or the eyes of the body—a mystery such as St. Paul declared beyond his knowledge), appearing just as he was when Pontius Pilate presented him to the Jews on the balcony of his palace, saying : “ Behold the Man.” One result of this, not unusual in mystics, was the appearance visibly on her person of the marks of Christ's wounds and of the blows He had received, as they had appeared to her. This Lenten season was the most sorrowful she had ever spent.

Later on, during the spring, she set out for Germany, in order to found the convent of Heidelberg in the Palatinate. For the previous eleven years Louis of Bavaria and his wife Mahaut had been asking for this convent, concerning which a contract had already been drawn up by a notary, making arrangements for its construction and binding Colette on the one hand and the princes on the other.\* When she found it possible to undertake the journey to Germany, she brought with her, along with several other nuns, the youthful Elizabeth of Bavaria, so as to allow her to see her parents. Colette seems to have spent several months in Heidelberg, and then to have come back through Nancy, where the Duke and Duchess of Lorraine had for a long time been asking her to found a monastery.

The first suggestions for this foundation had evidently been made many years previously, because the idea originated with the dowager-duchess of Lorraine, the wise and pious Margaret of Bavaria, daughter of the Emperor Rupert; whose husband, Charles II. of Lorraine, in a will made in 1425 of which we know all the details, bequeathed a hundred florins of gold to "the very devout" nun Colette, of the Order of St. Clare, "to be given to whichever of her convents she wishes"† The duchess and Colette had come to an agreement, either through some messenger or by letter, that the monastery was to be at Pont-à-Mousson. Colette had rejected Nancy as being much too worldly; and the duchess

\* See in the documents at the end of this volume, the original of the letter in which William of Casale authorised the foundation of this monastery of Heidelberg.

† Dom Calmet, *Historie Chronologique de la Lorraine*. Vol. III.

was favourably disposed towards Pont-à-Mousson from the fact that the dukes of Lorraine had a castle there, in which they frequently resided.

The date of Marguérite de Lorraine's death is not known. It is, however, quite possible that she was alive in 1440, at the time that Colette came to Nancy, and there is a strong tradition to this effect among the Poor Clares. But as her will is dated the 24th August 1434, it is usually assumed that she died in the summer of that year. In any case, whether this venerable princess was or was not alive, it was in her name and by means of her personal donations that the reigning duke and duchess founded the monastery of Pont-à-Mousson.

The reigning duke at that time was King René of Anjou,\* who had acquired the dukedom of Lorraine by his marriage, and who by a series of fortuitious happenings—deaths, adoptions, inheritance—had also become duke of Anjou, king of Sicily, count of Provence, duke of Bar, besides being one of the richest princes of his time. In 1440 he was visiting various parts of his widespread dominions, and we know that he was seldom seen

\* This was the "good King René," a crowned artist, composer of poems and roundels, designer of tapestries and stained glass windows. He is interred in the church of the Franciscans at Angers. The celebrated Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI. of England, was his daughter. Under his sway, the town of Nancy achieved in 1444-1445 a period of great splendour. It was there that the duke welcomed Charles VII., King of France, coming to assist him against the city of Metz, which had gained over the Duke of Burgundy to its side. During this eventful year the ducal palace of Nancy had under its roof the King and Queen of France, the young Queen of England, the Dauphiness of France, who was a princess of Scotland married to the future King Louis, and all the noblest princes of the realm.



at Nancy between 1437 and 1444. All the same, Colette's historians tell us while there she was received by René and Isabella. It is, of course, quite possible that they are right, as this might have taken place during one of their short periods of residence at the ducal palace there. The duke was at the time governing the province directly ; later on he entrusted it to his son, John of Calabria.

All details in connection with the new monastery were arranged, and the building was commenced. But not until seven years later, in 1447, was it completed and provided with a community. This was some months after the saint's death.

In the spring of 1440, Colette, weary, no doubt, from her long journey, returned at last to Besançon. But no sooner had she arrived there, than a strange, grievous form of pressure was brought to bear on her, having no less an object than to induce her to renounce the whole work of her lifetime. A blow was struck which she had no reason whatsoever to anticipate, and which was all the more severe as it was authorised by the Pope himself, and came from the hand of a saintly Italian friar, John Capistran—vicar of the great Bernardine of Sienna.

At this point it becomes necessary to review the situation, and to ascertain exactly what position the " Colettine reform " had secured in the Franciscan Order.

Its position was undoubtedly one of influence and dignity. Colette's work had not been restricted to the foundation of seventeen rigorously perfect convents, although this in itself would have been a very striking achievement. But in addition there were many other convents, some of very long standing, which, either through her intervention or of their own accord, had adopted the " reform,"

renouncing their possessions voluntarily, and uniting themselves to the crusade of poverty and perfection initiated by Colette. And several monasteries of friars had taken the same course.

So that an entirely new mode of life, based on a revived Franciscan spirit, had thus been introduced into the order. It is worthy of note that it was to the monastery of Dôle that Pope Eugene IV. applied for friars to reform the great Roman convent of Ara Coeli. Now Dôle, like Chariez and like Sellières, was entirely permeated by Colette's ideas and spirit. Sœur Perrine calls Dôle the "seminary" of the reform. Although the Abbess General had no canonical authority over these monasteries, she was allowed to nominate their "visitors," and in all of them she was listened to and consulted; they kept in close touch with her, and from them she selected the friars of whom she had need as messengers, diplomatists, or missionaries. Thus, little by little, around the first nucleus of the "reformed," and around the personality of Colette, there was formed a separate group in the Franciscan Order. This was known as "the Burgundian reform"; these were the "Colettine" friars and sisters.

Now this group, united under one rule, differed in one important point of general discipline from the rest of the Order, and especially from the two other contemporaneous "reforms"; one of which was known as the "Observance of Poitou," the other as the "Italian Observance." These two sections of the Order, being subject to the general direction of the Order, which was "conventual" in spirit and might therefore not agree with their special rules, sought to interpose between themselves and that supreme authority a "vicar" be-

longing to the "Observance" who would be empowered to safeguard the rights of his own subjects and to maintain their special rules. We have already seen how, at the Council of Constance, in 1415, they had succeeded in this matter. But Colette had never joined in these demands. She had always desired that her convents and subjects should remain in direct union with the head of the Order, the Father General, without any intervening power. She believed that she would always be able to make herself heard by the authorities, even if they were "conventual," and she did not wish to give any chance for schisms against the "obedience" of the Order. She and her adherents remained therefore separated from the "Conventuals" by the rigour of their poverty, but united to them inasmuch as they acknowledged their authority. On the other hand, they were divided in their government from the Observants, although their mode of life was the same. In making this arrangement, Colette was adhering strictly to her rights. That her judgment in this matter was sound was proved by the fact that her "reform" enjoyed the protection and approbation of the Holy Father from the beginning—an approbation frequently renewed; that her privileges were confirmed and enlarged by successive Popes; and lastly, that the General of the Order, William Casale, who although nominally "conventual" had a great respect for the Observants, had, year after year, testified his confidence in Colette by numerous letters, and had in 1434 given his approval to the most rigorous constitutions which were permitted in the Franciscan Order at the time.

John Capistran however, had wonderful visions

of a great reunion of the whole Order. Himself a coadjutor of St. Bernardine of Sienna in the direction of the "Observant" brethren, he had gained the approval and good will of Pope Eugene IV., and his one dream was that he might some day lead the two sections of the Order, prepared for unity, to the throne of the Sovereign Pontiff.

What was it that he hoped to gain through Colette? We do not know exactly. But of course any suggestion of union between two parties pre-supposes certain concessions on both sides; and it seems likely that what he asked from her was that, since she had remained subject to the authority of the "Conventuals," she should facilitate a closer approach between her adherents and theirs, by abandoning some of her special regulations. And possibly, at the same time, while urging on her that it would be well to concede certain points for the good of the whole Franciscan Order, he may have suggested to her, on the other hand, that if she did not feel free to unite fully with the Conventuals, she might strengthen the already dominating influence of the Observants, by throwing in her lot completely with them.

John Capistran had come to Besançon provided with the draft of a new set of Constitutions to be observed by the whole Order of Poor Clares, which had been decided on by the Pope and John himself. On the morning after his arrival Colette received him at her grille. His propositions took her completely by surprise. She felt herself in a most cruel dilemma. On the one hand was an important and most successful undertaking which she was asked to give up; on the other, the expressed wish of the Pope and the unity of the Seraphic Order.

John Capistran was a very impetuous man, wasted and worn by zeal and austerities, and of an unconquerable energy, as may be judged from the fact that, years afterwards, at the age of seventy, he went off to Hungary to assist John Hunyadi in the defence of Christendom against the invading Turks. At the time of his journey to France, he presented an appearance of the utmost poverty, barefooted and clothed in rags, but radiating courage and that almost childlike vitality which characterises the disciples of St. Francis.\* Colette, as soon as she understood the kind of arrangement which was proposed to her, and which it seemed she was almost commanded to accept, felt that she could not possibly discuss it there and then, and she asked of John to allow her two days to consider the matter.

Then she fled to her oratory, more exhausted from this sudden blow than from her long journey. What was she being asked to do? The letters of the Minister General were quite recent; she had them in the convent, exactly as they have come down to us, never having been taken out of the town of Besançon. She could therefore read them over again, and assure herself of their expressions of unbounded benevolence, of touching confidence. They contained absolutely no allusion to any forthcoming change, and two of those she had received from Genoa, no farther back than this present month of January. One of these stated that she could select whatever friars she pleased for the visitation of her convents or to assist them in spiritual matters, and that she might change

\* Æneas Sylvius, who saw him at Constance, describes him in these terms: "*Pusillum corpore, siccum, aridum, exhaustum, sola cute nervisque et ossibus compactum, laetum tamen, in labore fortem.*"

these helpers at will and as often as she pleased. How was she to reconcile these statements with Friar John Capistran's mission ?

Gathering her nuns around her, she put the whole question before them, pouring out to them the anguish of her soul. All the nuns immediately gave themselves up to extraordinary penances. Colette herself followed their processions on her knees, and during those two days she did nothing but weep and pray. At the end of this time, no decision had been arrived at. She asked for another delay, and requested her nuns to give her their opinions. But this they would not do. Dismayed, no doubt, at the hesitations of their Mother, whom they had always seen so clear, so definite in her decisions, they told her to do whatever she thought best. Thereupon Colette seems to have recovered her energies, and she told them that she was going to resist, and that they must continue to pray. She was determined not to yield. How could she destroy in a day what it had taken a life-time to build, deny all that she had professed, and rashly surrender to a life of mitigated austerities these men and women whom she had trained to a high and difficult ideal ? Besides, was it certain that these concessions would really serve any useful end ? Many attempts at union had already been made, based on the mitigation of the rules ; the invariable result being that those who wished for an easy life declared all restrictions too severe, and sought for fresh dispensations the moment the new rules were formulated.

Colette had suffered intensely during those days. We can easily imagine how much she missed the assistance of Père Henri. Even when she had her



mind made up, she delayed making known her decision to St. John. All this time he, while waiting in Besançon, was quietly making enquiries, studying the situation, coming to a better understanding of it. The result was a remarkable one :—entirely of his own accord he altered his opinions. He was truly a saint, caring more for the glory of God and the salvation of souls than for the success of any particular enterprise. Surrounded by the friars with whom he was staying and admiring, at his leisure, their virtues, he listened to their praises of Colette, and heard how much she was suffering from his rigorous demands. Then he saw Christ in a dream, and fully realised that he must no longer thwart the abbess in her work, for she had right on her side.

He ran in haste to the convent and spoke to Colette somewhat as follows, according to the narrative of one of the sisters : “ O Sister Colette, I ask your pardon ; I admit that I was wrong to interfere with you and annoy you without cause ; and never again shall I molest you in this way ; for I believe that your reform is according to God and St. Francis ; persevere as you have begun, because God is with you.” \*

Subsequently John Capistran had several interviews with Colette ; and when leaving he asked her to choose a monk who would accompany him everywhere so that he might never lose the spirit of her reform. And ever afterwards he was a faithful supporter of Colette’s work.

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After the Treaty of Arras, in 1435, Picardy was no

\* Narrative of Sister Marie de la Marche, daughter of King Jacques, as related by the friar, Claude Champion. Library of Besançon. Quoted by A. Germain, *op. cit.*, p. 253

longer a forbidden country to the French, as the English had given it back to Burgundy. Besides, the towns on both banks of the Somme had passed into the duke's hands, by a grant from the King of France. So that the Picardy where Colette's youth had been spent and of which she had never ceased to dream, was again accessible. It will have been noticed that she never cared to make any foundations in English territory, although this might have been arranged without difficulty through the influence of the Duke of Burgundy. The duke, at Colette's request, obtained from the Pope in 1437 a Bull, authorising a new convent at Hesdin, which was within his dominions. But that part of the country, although freed from foreign rule, was for several years subject to various disputes and disturbances ; so that Colette kept putting off her journey thither. On the other hand, the whole of Flanders and of the Low Countries had now come under the control of the Duke of Burgundy. And it would seem as if Colette perceived that a vast new field for her activities in the cause of religion was thus thrown open before her ; so that a last chapter in her long day's work—a final group of new foundations—was the result. Hitherto she had established convents in French Burgundy, in Bourbonnais, in Languedoc and in Savoy ; but from this period onwards, she devotes herself solely to Picardy and Flanders. She receives ever-increasing support and assistance from the General of the Order who, each time he presides at a Chapter, writes to her granting all her requests. She is constantly being asked to build, constantly encouraged to new undertakings. Ghent claims her services and so does Amiens. Nevertheless, she still lingers. It is so pleasant, so helpful to remain for a while

at the very heart of her work, in this convent of Besançon, pioneer and mother house ; to rest a little, to pray and meditate in peace. And perhaps she foresees that, although Flanders will welcome her, she will meet with rebuffs and difficulties in her native country. It would appear that she set out in 1441, and made her way at first towards Hesdin, where she expected to find a convent already built. But the work had not been properly looked after ; in fact, even the plan of the building had been too small ; so that various business worries kept her for a long time in this little out-of-the-way town. She was anxious to make it the centre of the Franciscan Order in Flanders, having doubtless chosen Hesdin for this purpose because it was there her former dear friend, Jean Pinet, had died, and she could therefore put her work under his especial care.

As soon as the difficulties at Hesdin had been overcome, she went on to Ghent, where she was awaited with great eagerness. As far back as 1427 a movement had been set on foot there for the construction of a Poor Clare convent, and funds had been collected for this purpose. Through the exertions of the people of Ghent, the building was completed in 1440, and Colette, some months previously, had written a letter from Besançon,\* apologising to the people of the town for not having been able to respond more quickly to their request. Her entry into Ghent, on the 3rd of August, 1442, was made with much solemnity. She must have stayed there rather less than two months, as we find her back in Besançon on the 11th October. During these weeks she displayed all her usual activity, making arrangements in connection with

\* A. Douillet, p. 392.

the foundation of an extremely poor convent, called "Bethlehem" on account of its destitution, and placing there as abbess Odette, a natural daughter of the Duke of Burgundy; receiving hundreds of visits from people in the town and neighbourhood, forming new friendships, and astonishing everyone by a sanctity which became every day more evident and more wonderful.

In October, on her return to Besançon, she found Friar John Capistran there. During the previous two years he had not in any way changed his opinion of her and he was anxious to testify this by formally confirming the privileges accorded to her by William of Casale. In November he writes to her as follows:—

"To Sister Colette of the Order of St. Clare, entirely devoted to Christ our Lord, our beloved daughter in the heart of the Spouse of Virgins; John Capistran, of the Order of Minors, on behalf of the Apostolic See and the Very Reverend Father Vicar General, Commissioner General north of the Alps, wishes salvation and eternal peace in the Lord."\* The letter which follows was written at Besançon by John himself on the 8th November, and it specifically confirms the permission given to Colette that the "visitors," whose duty it was to go from one convent to another, should always be chosen by Colette herself. Together the two saints went to Dôle, where the "seraphic" life had been carried on with great fervour for thirty years. Together again, they considered a two-fold proposition, the execution of which the Duchess of Burgundy was anxious to facilitate. This was to found a convent of nuns at Amiens, and at the same time, according to the usual arrangement, to introduce the "reform"

\* See this letter in its entirety in the Documents at end of book.

into the monastery of friars at Abbeville, which is close by ; so that each establishment should be a support to the other.

Their hopes with regard to Abbeville were not fulfilled. Three friars who went there, Pierre de Vaux, du Four, and Aleaume, came back without having been able to induce the brethren to alter their manner of life in the slightest.

In Amiens, on the other hand, it looked as if everything would proceed smoothly. At this time its governor was Philippe de Saveuse, who ruled both Amiens and Arras on behalf of the Duke of Burgundy ; and he offered to build at his own expense one or more monasteries. Colette accepted the offer for Amiens. In January she obtained from the king a grant freeing the new foundation from all taxes ; in July came the Bull from the Pope ; and in December, a letter from the Duke of Burgundy to the city councillors, directing them to assist in establishing the nuns there.

Immediately a violent opposition to the project arose in Amiens. In every such opposition we find people actuated by a great variety of motives ; administrators of property for instance, who wish to obtain rents for the land which has been transferred ; priests who claim various rights ; the bishop, who upholds their demands and who besides wishes to make certain that these new religious will be subject to his authority ; and then other religious belonging to different orders, who dislike the idea of an additional foundation in quest of charitable help and likely to deflect a share from the houses already established. Possibly, too, the newcomer's great reputation for penitential exercises is not altogether pleasing. So, in order to set the town

against Colette and her religious, all sorts of calumnies are circulated about them.

Pierre de Vaux, always a devoted missionary, takes up the defence of the projected convent. He circulates through the city a document addressed to the councillors, of which the last paragraph is as follows :

“ Therefore, noble citizens of Amiens, do not refuse or impede this work so pleasing to God, but for His love receive it joyfully. Sins are increasing, evils are multiplying, dangers are very great, and we must believe that we are greatly in need of help before Our Lord. Do not be making complaints about a poor piece of ground where we wish to have a little house ; it will be assigned to the children of Our Lord ; there are many other places which are profitable to no one ; and indeed each one of us will own quite enough for ever in a length of seven feet. And even if this house is in a fine street and on the great highway no one should be displeased at this, but should praise the Lord. And it is a happy exchange that for the possessions of this world, which are so soon left behind, we may obtain possessions in heaven, which will last for ever.”

This letter, so full of friendliness and good humour, had a great effect on the citizens of Amiens. In the spring of 1443, Colette with her nuns and attendants set out from Besançon towards Amiens, with the following passport given them by the duke :—

GHENT, 15th March, 1443.

Philip, by the grace of God Duke of Burgundy. . . . As a certain devout and religious person, our beloved in God sister Colette of the Order of St. Francis, has made known to us that in order to establish a community in the new convent which recently she has caused to be made,



built, and constructed in our city of Amiens . . . she has the intention and desire to set out and come from our country of Burgundy, where she is at present, to our said town of Amiens and elsewhere in our country and dominions on this side . . . and to bring there in her company a certain number of friars and nuns whom she has with her . . . we order and command and strictly enjoin you, our subjects, we request those of my said Lord the King, and require of all others, that the said Sister Colette and forty persons of her company, whether men or woman, friars or nuns, regulars or seculars . . . you shall assist, allow and permit to go, come and pass.

For Monsieur le Duc,

REUBERGH.

So Colette went to Amiens, and in January, 1444, her little company of nuns and friars was installed there. The objections and difficulties which had been raised were not yet completely overcome ; and various lengthy discussions with the chapter, with the parish priest, and with the bishop, had still to take place. The excessive prudence which had opposed the new foundation did not yield until all were fully assured that this convent would not in any way infringe on their rights. At long last satisfactory arrangements were made. Colette agreed to everything in which agreement was reasonable. When summer was approaching she returned to Besançon.



She returned there for the last time and for a short time only.

Colette, during these sacred closing months spent among her nuns, is constantly troubled by melancholy presentiments. During these days she becomes a veri-

table prophetess, foretelling happenings of the far-distant future. She causes the sisters to note down in her presence—so that the nuns may remember and be careful when the right time arrives—that the convent of Besançon will be devastated by fire and pestilence. Of the first of these disasters she indicates the time by warning them that the great cross in their cemetery will fall down across the graves when the fire is about to occur. In the year 1510, the nuns saw the cross fall. Remembering the prophecy of Colette, they were terrified and took every possible means to prevent a fire. But the very next day a fire started in the house opposite, and destroyed nearly all the convent. Looking forward towards events of more world-wide interest, Colette predicts the Protestant Reformation; she mourns over her southern convents, which will be lost to the Church, and over the determined efforts which will everywhere be made against the nun's vow of chastity, against the steadfast faith of the priest. Visions come to her frequently; sometimes she visualises the great evils which will afflict the Church, sometimes she is cheered by the sight of her religious reform, steadfastly enduring throughout these evils. She is alternately grieved and consoled. More than ever is she persecuted by those kinds of demoniacal hallucinations which during the last seven years of her life are to her a perpetual torture. Against her will there constantly arise before her mind figures of all sorts of men and women, some hideous, some beautiful, with long and elaborately dressed hair, uncovered neck and shoulders, resplendently dressed and decked out with ornaments. And if she looked at them even for a moment—and she could scarcely raise her eyes without seeing

something of the sort—she experienced an intense anguish which only abated by slow degrees. These last temptations—to that worldliness which she had all her life despised—now assailed the wasted frame, the enfeebled imagination, the nervous system worn to the last limit of endurance.

It is quite evident that, during these last years, Colette is wearied to the point of exhaustion. She takes no account of her weakness nor of her increasing illness, but she recognises the warning they convey. During this final sojourn at Besançon she is one day shown a new habit intended for an Augustinian monk who wishes to join the Franciscans. She looks at it, and asserts that this habit will never be used by a monk, but that she herself will be buried in it. As it turned out, the monk changed his mind, and Colette had the woollen robe, which had remained in the convent, placed in her bag, and brought it away with her.

When she sets out for Amiens, Courtrai and Ghent—intending also to go to Corbie if at all possible—this last departure means a rending of life-long ties, a series of heartbreaking farewells. Her nuns surround her weeping, and she herself gazes with emotion on this convent, these scenes which she had loved so much. So firmly is she convinced that this is her last leave-taking that she bequeaths to her nuns the few things which she possesses and values, representing as they do her most cherished memories: the breviary given to her by Benedict XIII. when receiving her into the Order of St. Clare forty years previously; the tall wooden crucifix bestowed on her by St. Vincent Ferrer; and a small cross, come she knew not whence, in which is enshrined

a small piece of the True Cross. This she calls "her cross from heaven." Among the Poor Clares there exists a tradition that the nuns, just as she was about to depart asked her to leave them also the staff which she always carried. She may perhaps have given it to them, but it is not now among the relics which have remained in the convent.

The parting is over at last. Perhaps it was then that, after reviewing in spirit her mission and her work, she said to the Father Confessor who accompanied her : " Father, all that I have done, with the help of Our Lord I have done it ; and notwithstanding that I am a great sinner and full of faults, if I had to do it over again I do not know how I would do it, except in the way in which I have done it." The strictest examination of conscience only served to show, even to herself, her undeviating goodwill. As life nears its end, a good servant will often ask himself whether he could not have done better ; but if he feels that he has done as well as he knew how, his heart will be at rest.

In February, 1445, while at Amiens, she declares that she has only two years more to live, and dictates instructions and directions to Father Francis Claret.

Those around her notice how her strength is failing. " But," says Pierre de Vaux, " until the very end virtuously and perseveringly did she work." It seemed to her friends that she could scarcely hold herself upright, and that it would be impossible to bring her " half a league along the road without her giving up her spirit." But in this body, so weak and so tortured, she retains her wonted courage. She wishes to continue " the works of God " and to spread them still more widely ; and to those who

plead the state of her health, she replies that her death is a matter of great indifference to her ; that she is quite ready to meet it whenever it pleases God, " in the fields just as well as in the town, or in the town just as well as in the fields." There is one more project on which she has set her heart, and to which she had been looking forward during all those years of exile : and that is, to establish a little convent in her native town—in Corbie ; and thus complete the chain of her good works. There the first link of that chain had been forged ; there, perhaps, she might be permitted to weld the last. Thus, as death approaches, do we all turn instinctively towards the scenes of our early life. Colette might very reasonably hope that after all the proofs of zeal in God's service given by her during the course of her life, and the great renown achieved by her monasteries, the forty-year-old opposition of her native town would be extinct. But man's rancour is very tenacious. And Colette was now to engage in a struggle which would last two years and end in failure.

All the necessary preliminaries for this hoped-for foundation at Corbie were put in train. The townspeople agreed to the undertaking on the 5th April, 1445. On the 30th October, Philippe de Saveuse obtained from the Pope a Bull authorising the building of the convent. The Duke of Burgundy, being appealed to, wrote letter after letter to the Benedictines, who were offering a determined opposition. The King and Queen of France intervened in person. But all was to no purpose.

The abbot of the Benedictines had shown himself somewhat favourable to the project, but the prior and monks were of a different mind. Their old jealousies

still existed, and they considered that a want of respect had been shown them in not consulting them from the very beginning. They absolutely refused to yield. Parliament, on being appealed to, upheld them.

Here are some of the letters written in connection with the matter.

A letter from Colette to the King of France : \*

“ TO OUR LORD THE KING.

Jesus Christ ! In humble supplication, the most useless servant of Jesus Christ, and your unworthy petitioner, Sister Colette, a poor nun of the Order of St. Clare. For the past year or so, the Lord and Lady de Saveuse, inspired by devotion and by the extreme sympathy which they have for our poor Order, have wished to make and construct a convent and a monastery of the said Order of St. Clare, and of our way of living, within the town of Corbie ; and for this purpose have obtained a Bull and mandate from our Holy Father the Pope, and in order to execute them according to their authority and purport, have presented them to their lordships the Abbot, Prior, and community of Saint Pierre, of the said Corbie, as was proper, praying and requesting of them that they should be willing humbly to obey it. To which a reply was given by his lordship the Abbot, that he had no intention of opposing the Bulls of our Holy Father, and since then has always been and still is satisfied ; and the citizens, tradespeople and inhabitants of this town are also satisfied. But the said Prior and community were not satisfied and will not consent to it. The said lord and lady, fortified by the authority of our said Holy Father

\* *Bibliothèque Nationale*. Collection de Picardie. Vol. XXXIV. Collated by Dom Grenier.



and the consent of the said abbot, have caused the convent to be commenced and built, at great expense and outlay, in works as well as in provisions and materials ; and to block the wall already commenced, the said monks have obtained an order from your parliament by virtue of which the work has been stopped : which is a great wrong, delaying the divine office and the good thus begun. And when Madame de Bourgogne was informed of the difficulties and obstacles raised by these monks, she caused remonstrances to be made, and begged of them and requested that they would give their consent. To which they refused to agree, finally and decisively ; and because this is a very lamentable matter, and concerned, above all, with the honour of God, the spread of His divine worship and the salvation of souls whom He has created and ransomed, we turn to you as to our last and sovereign refuge in this poor world. Requesting that in your kind and compassionate mercy and following in this matter your noble predecessors and most christian kings, as you have always been accustomed to do, looking not to creatures but simply and solely to the Creator. . . .

May it please your gracious benignity, your unassuming and cordial charity, to grant your goodwill and such support to the good work commenced that it may quickly attain completion, so that God's service there may promptly begin.

May it please you also to free from all taxes the place and site where the said convent is to be built.

And that, moreover, by Your Majesty's royal authority and absolute power, you would be pleased by a special grant to give permission and authorisation to finish and complete the said convent notwithstanding the said ob-

jections . . . by giving and assigning a well-meaning and suitable judge, such as your bailiff at Amiens, or some other. . . .

How can their rights be prejudiced or injured? because the poor nuns cannot nor ought not at any time have any overlordship or jurisdiction, nor income nor revenues, nor rents, but live on alms only, following the counsels of the Holy Gospel and of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that, of your kindness and generous mercy, in pity and compassion, you will please arrange this, and you will be doing well and charitably, and will place our poor Order under further obligations to pray for your high and holy intentions; a thing we always wish to do with all our poor powers; for God knows and understands that through your good and noble help there were built the convents of Le Puy in Auvergne and of Amiens in Picardy, and without this they would not have been built, as I believe; and also many other good works in your noble kingdom, which may God protect. Amen."

The Duchess of Burgundy wrote with her own hand to the Prior and the monks of the church and monastery at Corbie, enjoining on them not to oppose the establishment of Colette's convent. Charles VII., in response to Colette's petition, gave the order, as he had been asked, for the remission of taxes, in a document dated from Rasily near Chinon, the 29th July, 1446. Queen Marie of France and the dauphin Louis wrote in their turn and with the same object in view, to the nuns in Corbie who were trying to hold their own against this opposition. But all in vain. The Benedictines on their side took action, and obtained from the Parliament a decree con-

formable to their wishes. In the end, it became evident that the ill-will of a few friars would prevail. These friars in fact demanded that Colette should solve the difficulty by renouncing her project. Doubtless they made hypocritical appeals to her love of peace, and themselves posed as peacemakers. And so Colette at length gave way ; and the same hand which had written the foregoing petition to the king, wherein she shows herself so certain of her rights, and so assured that she was acting only for the best, also penned the following reply to the Benedictines of Corbie :—

“ IHESUS, MARIA,

“ To my most honoured and revered Lords, their Lordships the Prior and the Monks of Corbie.

“ As humbly as I can or know how, I recommend my poor soul to your holy prayers and devout petitions before Our Lord Jesus Christ ; and may it please you to know that I have received your letters, which you have been pleased to write and send to me, stating how Mgr. de Saveuse wishes to build a monastery of our order in your town of Corbie, and several other things concerning these matters, which it would take too long to detail.

“ I declare to you that, not at my request, but at the instance and request of the said Seigneur de Saveuse, and by the permission and authority of our Holy Father the Pope, and with the consent and approval of the Reverend Father in God, Monseigneur de Corbie, given and granted to the said Seigneur de Saveuse, for the sovereign honour and perfect love of God, the exaltation of His most holy name, and the increase of the spiritual and temporal

good of the said town, I did consent to the construction and building of the said convent.

“ Not, truly, that I ever had any desire or intention or wish that the said convent should be prejudicial to your rulership or jurisdiction ; nor in any way injurious to the churches or to the poor, to those of the place or from a distance. Because, if this would really be so, and even if the said monastery were, with your consent and approval, completely constructed and finished, I would never occupy it or remain there, because that would be usurping the rights of others.

“ But, before God, I believe that the said undertaking would be to the honour of God and to your honour also, and to the credit of the monastery and even to its profit, and would be of great use to you and to all the inhabitants of the town ; as I have always seen and known by experience to be the case in all places where our other convents were built, that is to say, in large, in medium-sized and in small towns, some of these towns being smaller and poorer than Corbie ; but through God’s will I never saw any which were not provided for without prejudicing or doing harm to others ; nor that the noblemen, townspeople, regulars or seculars, suffered any discredit or injury therefrom.

“ You call upon me to desist from the building of the convent ; and this I am going to do, with great regret.

“ For I doubt not, that once you come before the Lord who judges all things, you will have to explain why you hindered so excellent a work.

“ Nevertheless, at your desire I shall request the said Seigneur [de Saveuse] that he may be pleased to depart from the convent and give up the work, because we have

all come to the conclusion that never while you live will you permit that the said monastery be built, as long as your resistance shall be of any avail.

"Most honoured and religious Lords, I humbly pray the Holy Spirit that He may always keep you in his holy grace, and finally grant you everlasting grace.

"Your useless petitioner,

"SISTER COLETTE."

"Written at Hesdin, the 2nd day of March."

From this we can see how violently Colette was opposed by these monks," *qui ne souffriraient jour de leurs vies que le monastère soit edifié!*" Colette bent her head before a stern necessity. Yet still powerful friends intervened. The pope sent to Corbie a new Bull which was in fact a command, with three commissioners, of whom one was a Benedictine—the Abbot of Anverbode near Louvain. The monks heeded neither Bull nor commissioners, nor gave way even before the threat of excommunication. Their abbot, overwhelmed by their animosity and their stubborn resistance, acted somewhat like Pontius Pilate. He made a declaration before the Provost of Corbie that he at least had given his consent ; but he restricted himself to this formality.

When at last Colette reluctantly decided that all further efforts were useless and that she could never hope to see the Poor Clares in Corbie, she left Hesdin and went on to Ghent, passing through Courtrai on her way. Everywhere she goes, during these last months when her health was so gravely impaired, she multiplies proofs of her foresight, her wisdom and her kindness. She cures a novice who had accidentally lost an eye ; and is much displeased with the community who on account of this infirmity were

unwilling to receive this young girl. She hears that John Capistran, with an excessive zeal which oversteps the limits of good sense, has asked of the pope that all violations of Colette's rule shall be considered mortal sins. Colette immediately protests, demanding that this dangerous edict shall be recalled. The only mortal sins which a nun can commit in connection with her rule are those against any of her three vows, or against certain points of the Constitutions.

While passing through Courtrai, it is suggested that she should meet a recluse who is reputed never to eat, and who is held in great veneration in the town. But Colette, warned by her unfailing instinct, refuses to take any interest in this prodigy. The woman, it was discovered soon afterwards, was only pretending to fast, and used to take nourishment in secret.

These are the only details which have come down to us concerning this journey to Ghent, which was to be her last. In the last days of 1446 she arrives there, and again predicts that "her life will not be long." The early months of 1447 are indeed little else than a prologue to her death. Truly has she, in the words of Pierre de Vaux, "virtuously and perseveringly worked to the very end." For the end is coming swiftly; and it only remains for us to chronicle the last pages of the story, to relate the impressive and touching details; noted with reverent and impassioned affection by those around her during those last days on earth when other activities had ceased before the unrelenting work of death.

\* \* \*

In the beginning of February she tells the sisters that before long she will go to God. And, gathering them



around her, she exhorts and advises them from the very depths of her affectionate heart. She counsels them to be true religious, loyal and perfect, loving God with a great and sovereign love. She keeps them with her for a long time, and before they leave, she warns them against any desire they may have to hear her speak on her deathbed. "Do not expect that I shall say anything at my death" she says, "for I shall say nothing; I shall not speak to you." Was this because she foresaw all that she should suffer, or was it that she wished to commune undisturbed with God during her last hours? We do not know. About this time her habitual sufferings were increased by an acute internal pain which lasted until she died.

On Sunday, 26th February, she goes to Confession, assists at Mass with great devotion and receives Holy Communion. During the following night, her soul is flooded with heavenly light. But she is no longer strong enough to support these divine favours; the next day she is as helpless as a little child and seems to have lost consciousness, and later on she becomes so faint that those around her think she is going to die there and then. She remains in this condition of weakness for so long that Pierre de Vaux administers the Last Sacraments, and begins to read the prayers for the dying. But at length she rallies somewhat, and the father confessor goes away for a little while.

The following day finds her at six o'clock in the morning kneeling in her oratory, ready to hear Mass, as if her health had suddenly returned. She adores God and prays with the greatest fervour, weeping abundantly; and continues equally well for the rest of the week,—until

the Saturday, when she assists at Mass for the last time. This is the week of the Lenten Quarter Tense.

After this Saturday, 4th March, she suffers from "an unaccustomed malady" from which she knows that only death will deliver her. On the previous evening—Friday—she had spoken for a long time, with great sweetness and gentleness, to the friars whom she had assembled around her; and on the Saturday morning she again says farewell to them and asks for their prayers. Then about eight o'clock, having heard Mass and prayed for some time, she goes towards her couch of straw, gazes at it for a moment, and having made "a great sign of the cross" she says, "*Vecy la derraine couchez.*" (This will be the last time of lying down) and then lies down, unassisted, and fully dressed, as she had always done. Around her head she placed the black veil which Benedict XIII. had given her long before, when receiving her into the Order of St. Francis. And then commenced her last agony, which continued for two entire days, during which she was fully conscious.

On that so-called bed, that wretched truss of straw between wooden props, she lies motionless, suffering acutely; her eyes shut, her lips closed, uttering no single word. From time to time Pierre de Vaux and another friar, one of her lifelong helpers, steal into the oratory. They are anxious to be present at her last moments, but the dying abbess wraps herself in silence, and they know not what sign to look for, so that they may judge of her condition. Colette, although her eyes are closed, is aware of their presence, and by a slight movement intimates that they are to be sent away; her time is not yet come. For forty-eight hours she remains thus, without

stirring. The sisters, distressed that her head should be resting on nothing except a little bag of straw, bring her a feather pillow, but she noticed this at once and "pushed it away."

On Monday, the 6th of March, a little before midday, "in the presence of all the nuns of the convent of Ghent, of her father confessor and his companion, she very humbly finished her life."

The sisters who laid her out noticed that the colour which she had when dying remained unchanged for twelve hours after her death, then suddenly "her body was transformed into a marvellous beauty. It was as white as snow, and the veins showing through the white were like clear azure, and all the limbs were so beautiful, so fair, so flexible and supple, so perfumed and fragrant, that it seemed as if they really were evidence of a state of innocence and of absolute stainlessness and purity. More than thirty thousand people came to see her, partly from devotion, partly from wonder. The third day after her death her beautiful and virginal body, just as it was, without its beauty being in any way lessened, was buried devoutly and very simply as she had arranged not long before her death. Many times she had spoken of how Our Lord for the love of us, willed to die out in the open, poor, unclothed, owning nothing; and in the same way she desired to be buried out in the open, and near the cloister without shroud or coffin, but simply restoring her to her mother earth without anything else."\*

Her wishes were carried out; she was buried in the earth itself, in a shallow grave, and without any winding sheet.

\* Narrative of Pierre de Vaux, p. 166.

In several of her convents—Orbe and Castres among others—celestial music was heard; it seemed as if innumerable angels were chanting a song of inexpressible beauty, such as had never before been heard. And several of her religious saw her appear; she remained in the view of one of them so long that the nun had time to recite the “Our Father” a hundred times while looking at her. The saint was standing erect, and the nun saw her through her window. But her face seemed so bright and dazzling that it was impossible to look at it steadily; it seemed as if there was “a resplendent sun in place of her head.” Pierre de Vaux, who afterwards visited the convents, found in several of them nuns who had seen similar visions. The Mother had appeared to them full of heavenly joy, followed by a double row of angels and saints, and of souls whom her death had released from suffering. And it seemed as if she who in this world had spent so much time in journeying wearily from place to place, was now speeding, radiant and effortless as the lightning flash, across the starry spheres of heaven.

■  
\* \*

Colette's body remained for a long time at Ghent. The grave was at first protected by a light wooden shelter, which before long became a tiny sanctuary. From all parts of the world people came to pray there and to ask for favours. The Queen of France made a pilgrimage to it, as did also the Queen of England and Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, third wife of Charles the Bold. This princess caused to be transcribed a copy of the life of Colette, as drawn up by Pierre de Vaux; and this magnificently illuminated manuscript was presented by her to the Poor Clares of Ghent. For nearly

a century the grave remained untouched ; and then, in 1536, Mgr. de Croy, bishop of Tournai, desired his suffragan, Mgr. Nicolas, bishop of Larepta, to undertake the exhumation of the bones ; which were then enclosed in a small narrow coffer, about three feet long. In 1557, during the religious wars, Ghent was menaced by the Huguenots. The nuns fled, carrying to Arras the reliquary, which was brought back to Ghent when they returned there nine years later. It was only in 1782 that these relics finally left Ghent, where they had reposed for more than three centuries.

At that time, the Emperor Joseph II decreed the expulsion of all nuns from Flanders. Thereupon a French princess, Madame Louise of France, nun of the Carmelite Order at St. Denys, asked as a favour that the remains of the Venerable Colette should be given to her.

The nuns of the convent at Ghent then set out on a most remarkable journey ; at first a secret flight, soon becoming a triumphal procession, through the towns of Picardy and Artois, passing through Lille, Arras, Doullens and Amiens, and finally reaching Chantilly and St. Denys. There Madame Louise of France received the relics with the greatest reverence ; exposed them during some days for the veneration of the faithful in the chapel of the Carmelites ; and then formally donated them, by a duly signed deed of gift, to the Poor Clare monastery at Poligny.

And there the body of St. Colette has since reposed. During the Revolution it was hidden away, for the republican fanatics of the town wanted to burn it in honour of the " goddess Reason " ! But happily the relics escaped

their fury ; a pious woman hid them ; and in 1806 they were returned to the shrine in the convent, where they still remain. The sisters from Ghent who had found a refuge in Poligny had to fly for their lives once more during the fury of the Revolution ; and they brought with them the mantle of St. Colette which had formed part of the relics presented to Madame Louise of France.

\* \* \*

Some saints are canonised immediately after their death ; others, notwithstanding a considerable reputation for sanctity, do not obtain this dignity for long ages afterwards. When the first witnesses become fewer and fewer and finally die out, it of course becomes necessary for an entirely new set of zealous promoters to come forward and band themselves together for the advancement of the cause. Not that zealous friends were lacking in the case of Colette—far from it. The protracted history of her canonisation is that of a long series of new beginnings ; then a certain amount of work accomplished, and later on interrupted by some imperative hindrance ; and afterwards perseveringly resumed. It is a remarkable fact that Pope Nicholas V., who was elected on the very day of Colette's death, and before whom the first informative process was made, should have been the pope to whom fell the signal honour of terminating the schism in the Church. Charles the Bold took up her cause in 1472, and it was subsequently supported at the court of Rome by the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, by the duke of Lorraine, by Charles VIII., king of France, who had been requested to give his assistance by Loyse de Savoie, a Poor Clare nun of the convent of Orbe, subsequently beatified ; by a great number of bishops, and by the citizens of one



of the towns dear to Colette, who joined together in a general petition.

Nevertheless, repeated delays, deaths, and other difficulties retarded the formal enquiries in connection with the cause, so that at times matters dragged on very slowly ; and, although for a considerable time Colette had received certain public honours on the altars of the Church, it was not until 1604 that she was accorded the title of " Blessed"; while her canonisation was not accomplished till 1807. A great number of popes had taken part in the advancement of her cause, and nearly all had shown a personal interest in it. Pius VI. had in 1781 formally recognised the authenticity of three miracles, accomplished by the intercession of Blessed Colette since her death ; and in 1790 had decreed that her canonisation might be proceeded with.

It was Pius VII. who, in 1807, solemnly proclaimed her a saint—that great and gentle pope, whose future, in that particular year, held so little promise of security. The snares which he had hitherto avoided might easily be set for him again, and the Emperor Napoleon was an ever-present menace. " Perhaps it may be only for another few months that we shall be at liberty to act as Pontiff " he wrote. " Let us then hasten the celebration of a feast during which the tiara, given to us by an ungrateful son, may still be resting on our brow,"\* And the ceremony of canonisation was fixed for the 24th May, 1807.

It was a splendid celebration. For forty years, no new saint had been proclaimed at Rome. Many thousands

\* *Historie de l'Eglise*. By E. Mouret. Vol. VII. *l'Eglise de la Révolution*, p. 363.

of the faithful came flocking there ; some from the remotest parts of Bohemia and Hungary.\* The great Basilica of St. Peter was decorated as for great solemnities ; thousands of tapers in glittering lustres gave it a festal brilliancy ; and in the evening the whole city of Rome was illuminated.

It was a re-awakening of religious gladness from the anxious life led for many years past by three successive pontiffs ; and it also meant a renewal of public veneration for Colette, humble saint that she was, after long centuries of obscurity.

The praises given her on this occasion have a special value, coming from a man like this Pope Pius VII. Benign, refined, of lofty soul, of a tenacious gentleness which refused to be beaten down, this Pope pronounced in the Basilica of St. Peter a solemn yet joyful panegyric of Colette, seeming to experience a sense of relief in quitting political cares in order to breathe for a moment the free and untainted atmosphere of a saint's life.

This discourse was also a Bull, intended to perpetuate in the Church the remembrance of the actions and virtues of Colette.† We give some short fragments from this discourse of Pius VII. He begins as follows :

“ The royal psalmist saw in spirit the Spouse of Christ, standing at His right hand, robed in a golden mantle surrounded by glittering ornaments. And truly, the

\* Report of Alquier, the ambassador of France, quoted in the work mentioned above.

† After Colette of Corbie, four other *Beati* were canonised on this 24th May, 1807. They were four Italians : St. Benedict the Moor a shepherd of Sicily ; St. Angela de' Merici ; St. Hyacinthe Mares, and St. Francis Caracciolo.

blossoms of all the virtues, which develop fully only in the Catholic Church, form for her a precious and richly decorated garment, while the different Orders of saints which surround her form a marvellously varied embellishment. Here we find the invincible strength of the martyrs, the persevering constancy of the penitents, the humble piety of widows, the inviolable chastity of virgins . . . .”

The sovereign pontiff goes on to relate the life of Colette, a recluse at first, then a foundress, and continued an extended eulogy.

“During the space of forty years Blessed Colette worked with all her strength for the honour of God’s name . . . . Notwithstanding the graces with which He had endowed her, notwithstanding the extraordinary praises which she received from the lowly, from the great, from princes, she had a soul so humble that she described herself most sincerely as unworthy of the light of day. She led a celestial life, having only one end in view : never to say, never to do, never to think anything which did not tend to the glory of God. Hence, her abounding joy—the joy of a soul transported with happiness ; hence the words and sighs through which gushed out the ardours of her love . . . . She had led a life of such severity that one can hardly believe it . . . .

“When the news of her death spread around the neighbourhood, great numbers hastened from all sides : among them being distinguished men of all ranks, matrons, noblemen, priests ; and besides these the deaf, the dumb, the paralysed and invalids of all sorts, who placed in the intercession of the Servant of God the hope of a certain cure and all cried out with one voice that Colette was

worthy of being added to the number of the blessed court of heaven.

“ The question of the public honour which had been given her since her death having been discussed by the Cardinals constituting the Sacred Congregation of Rites, it was agreed by all that this honour was based on reasons so important that without any difficulty the examination for the canonisation of the Beatified might be proceeded with.

“ The marvellous cures which were reported as having been obtained through her intercession were discussed at three meetings. Pius VI., our predecessor of venerable memory, decreed on the 12th August 1781, that they should be ranked as true miracles.

“ The first of these miracles happened to Sister Rose Cræs, who in a moment was cured of a chronic loss of power of the left lower limb, the result of a transverse fracture, complicated by a fracture of the knee and the imperfect union of the fragments.

“ The second happened to Marie Thérèse Smidt, a tertiary of the order of St. Francis, who was suddenly cured of an ulcerated tumour in the left epigastrium, and of other serious maladies.

“ The third was the sudden cure of Brother Romain de la Motte, professed lay brother of the Order of the Recollects of St. Francis, who was suffering from pulmonary phthisis in an aggravated and chronic form ; his health was entirely restored.\*

“ And therefore, after a secret Consistory . . . and also

\* It is generally known that *four* miracles are required for a canonisation. In the case of St. Colette (the fourth miracle proposed, which was unsupported by sufficient medical evidence, having been withdrawn) a special dispensation was granted, on account of the strength of her cause.

a public Consistory convoked by us, we asked a great number of patriarchs, archbishops and bishops, to assist us with their counsel in so important a matter, and to record for us their votes as to the canonisation of the Blessed Colette. All agreed willingly in pronouncing the following judgment ; that the remarkable sanctity of Colette, the Servant of God, as well as the miracles and wonders wrought by her intercession, were so evident, according to the considered judgment of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, that we ought to grant her by formal decree the highest form of public honours : all which things we have commanded to have drawn up in public documents, and to gather together the judgments by each individual hand, in order to preserve them in the archives of the Holy Roman Church.

“ All this having been happily accomplished, and nothing in the way of necessary diligence appearing to be omitted, we commanded that renewed prayers should be addressed to God, on account of the importance of so grave a matter. Accordingly we ordained days of general fasting for the town of Rome, besides our very humble and continual prayers in public supplication, praying that, filled with the spirit of wisdom of the Most High, we might with confidence do His will.

“ Therefore, on this day, Sunday, 24th May, the solemn festival of the Most Holy Trinity, having done all that should be done . . . we have come to the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles at the Vatican, adorned magnificently and in a religious spirit, as is suitable for the House of God. We have come there in procession, following the solemn rite of supplication, preceded by all the orders of clergy, secular and regular, all the colleges of the

Roman Curia, each according to rank. And there, in company with the venerable assembly of cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops and bishops of the Holy Roman Church, we have listened with pleasure to the petition three times repeated, asking for the glorification of Blessed Colette, which has been adressed to us by our dear son, Inigo Diego Carraciolo, Cardinal Priest of the Holy Roman Church, of the title of St. Augustine, duly constituted procurator of postulates for the canonisation.

“ Having therefore implored, etc.

“ For the honour of the holy and undivided Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic faith, for the spread of the Christian religion and the honour of divine worship, through the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and our own . . . we have decreed that the Blessed Colette Boellet, reformer of the Order of St. Clare, remarkable for her virtues, dowered with gifts from heaven, fertile in miracles and illustrious by marvels after her death, *is a saint* and ought to be honoured and invoked as a saint, as, by the tenor of these presents, we hereby decree, establish and define ; enacting that each year, throughout the church, her memory should be honoured with piety and devotion and celebrated in the rite suitable for virgin saints, on the 6th day of the month of March.

“ It is therefore forbidden to everyone to disobey this page of our definition and decree.

“ Given at Rome, at St. Peter’s, the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord, 1807, the 9th day before the kalends of June, in the eighth year of our pontificate

PIUS, Bishop of the Roman Church.”

Then follow the signatures of twenty-nine cardinals,



the recording entry of the Secretary of Briefs, and the seal duly affixed.

\* \* \*

The greatest of all the saints of France, rivalling St. Teresa and St. Catherine of Sienna in virtues and good works—such is the impression of St. Colette left on the minds of those who have studied her life in order that they might tell her story. And it is their earnest wish that others, in ever-increasing numbers, may also come to know and to appreciate her. Despite the secrecy in which she sought to shroud herself, despite her humility and her reticence, she was unquestionably not only a great saint, but a very remarkable personality.

Eloquent and silent in turn, ever zealous yet ever prudent, mild and gentle in the exercise of her authority, always striving to hide from human eyes the radiance of her sanctity, Colette takes her place among the true women of France, those who veil in silence the secret fires of their hearts, the forceful ardour of their lives. In that fateful century of French history, that epoch of far-reaching changes and disturbances, she is a notable figure, even though we must seek for her efficacy among the deep-hidden currents of events, rather than on the lighted surface. She prepared the way for Joan of Arc, to whom her life, spent in attempting great things for God, was an inspiration and a support, and whom she often assisted by means of the great influence she possessed, both in political matters and in the Franciscan Order. Her help, though given in secret, was none the less undeniable. At the core of great political movements Colette found work to be done for the glory of God, for the welfare of France. In all this, no doubt, there was an element

transitory and evanescent ; there were results concerned solely with the passing moment, with one century, one period of time, one kingdom.

But far beyond these limitations of time and space, immutable and ever-enduring, there remains her spirituality, her perfection—in a word, her sanctity. In the history of mankind, these great souls remind us of the stars in the firmament, whence, as from points immeasurable and unknown, there comes to this earth of ours a long ray of light. And so, across the centuries, Colette shines forth, serene and calm, her name a symbol of the purest asceticism, the most fruitful activity, the most forceful zeal in God's service, the truest love of souls.

During her life-time there were many friends who loved her dearly ; and although when in the presence of men whose minds were warped with worldly interests and passions, she always maintained her attitude of uncompromising rectitude, these men never bore her any grudge ; on the contrary, they regarded her with love and veneration. To people, priests and princes she set a lofty standard of virtue while always retaining their affectionate devotion. We who have taken up the task of tracing anew her footsteps, of showing forth her personality, now dedicate to her a similar devotion, having found her so much more perfect than we ever dreamed, and in her perfection, so winning, so loveable. And, remembering the device of Poligny, that little town at the foot of the Alps which numbers her relics and many a souvenir of her among its treasures, we say very earnestly : " May it please God " that devotion to St. Colette, through the study of her holy life, shall henceforth spread far and wide.

*" A Dieu playse ! "*

## EPILOGUE.

### ST. COLETTE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

ST. COLETTE prophesied that her Order would last until the end of the world. It has, in fact, survived many strange vicissitudes during the five and a half centuries that have passed over her work of reform ; and at the present hour numerous and flourishing communities maintain the fire and light of Colette's spirit in far-sundered lands. In Ireland, where the name of St. Francis remained a watchword of blessing throughout the worst days of persecution, the Colettine reform has engrafted itself upon the living stem of St. Clare's Poor Ladies, and is, as we write, represented by three monasteries—St. Damian's, Donnybrook, St. Clare's, Carlow, and the Immaculate Conception, Cork. In these, the rule of poverty, self-denial, prayer, silence, seclusion and obedience, which was the precious bequest of Francis, Clare and Colette, is held in full honour and animates lives that are continual voluntary sacrifices for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. One is tempted at this point to write of the details of Colettine rule ; but those who desire much fuller information may find satisfaction at the authentic sources ; while, its general character and aims will have appeared plainly enough to all readers of the preceding pages.

What the spirit of the modern Colettine, as of the ancient, is, may be simply illustrated by an anecdote—the last recounted in a recent history of the Order.\* Mère Marie Séraphine, Abbess of the convent at Valence had borne for over twenty years the cares of her Office and the heavier burden of incessant and painful illnesses. Kind friends, however, were praying earnestly for her. They prayed for her recovery at Lourdes ; and one day, while they were thus engaged at the Grotto, the Abbess in her distant cell at Valence felt as if a strong yet gentle hand were laid upon her, and straightway all her pains disappeared. It flashed upon her that she was cured—that those good heaven-stormers had won from Mary a miracle on her behalf. So she went to the statue of Our Lady in the community-room, there prostrated herself, and cried : “ O my dear mother, are you going to leave me nothing more to suffer ? Oh, do not let it be so ! ” And the Queen of Martyrs heard this prayer. The pains returned and ceased no more until the faithful sufferer received in a saintly death the final healing.

So had a Colettine of 1900 learned the lessons of 1400. It is good for us all to know something of the lives lived in such a spirit, of the work of God thus secretly done in our midst : to be moved to gratitude towards unseen helpers, whose innocence bears vicariously pains that should else fall terribly upon sinners : to be reminded how life would be made better worth living—from every point of view—if each emulated just a little in his own sphere the contempt of the world, the devoted service, the

\* *Histoire Abrégée, de l'Ordre de Sainte-Claire d'Assise. Par des Clarisses Colettines.* 80, St. Augustin : 5, Rue Victor Hugo, Lyon. 1906. 2 vols.

resolute climb towards God, of the daughters of St. Colette.

These reflections, will, of course, appeal with peculiar force to any soul that is susceptible of an actual call to follow the Colettine or some similar vocation. Such a call, should it come, is a special honour to be treated of intimately with the Divine Sender. But the limits of a strictly "religious" vocation ought not to confine the influence exercised by the spirit that radiated from Colette. The need for penance knows no such limits. When the disciples were terrified at the news of some big temporal calamities, Our Lord said to them : " Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." (St. Luke, Chap, xiii). And He warned similarly the women of Jerusalem in the day of His Passion (St. Luke, Chap, xxiii). Vividly and intensely did Colette realise the application of those divine admonitions to her own distracted land and era. Recall (for example) her terrible vision of the mangled child (Chapter v). And who will refuse to admit their application to our day? No one, surely, who has any visions of the contemporary world as it lies in the light of the Gospel. We need men and women powerful by prayer, by sacrifice, by union with the crucified Redeemer. The Church is persecuted, thwarted, calumniated. Her little ones are taken from her and perverted. Her army of good priests is lamentably insufficient to attend to a world of two thousand million human beings. Her authority is flouted, her sacraments and sacrifice deserted, in lands once proud of their Catholic faith and practice. The scourges of war, far from detaching men from the world and humbling them before God, have waked to fury the contrary vices.

The Divine justice permits or sends these plagues and chastisements : the Divine mercy would end them if man's perversity would permit : meantime the Holy Spirit asks for prayer and sacrifice, for willing victims. Not such victims—unhappy ones—as the world makes, slain by blind self-will and self-indulgence ; but happy victims that, forsaking perishable dross, earn eternal life and priceless recompense. Such victims—souls devoted to prayer and penance—are the needful salt of this poor earth, on which “ all flesh has corrupted its way ”—now, as in the days when the great deluge was sent to cleanse it, or in the days when Colette devoted herself. She and her family were and are among the leaders of that bright array of ever-living victims. May this book help to increase the number of their friends, their imitators, their postulants !

*The Editor.*



## APPENDIX.

### REFERENCES AND DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE BIOGRAPHY OF ST. COLETTE OF CORBIE.

#### REFERENCES.

The chief authorities on which this biography of St. Colette is based, are the two lives of the saint written by her contemporaries ; one by Pierre de Reims, also called de Vaux, the confessor of the saint ; and the other by Perrine de la Balme, a nun of her Order. These two Lives, which have been the foundation of all biographies of St. Colette, and also of the sketch written by the Bollandists, were known through the authentic copies which were to be found in several Poor Clare Convents, more especially in that of Poligny (Jura). In recent times, Père Ubald d'Alençon, the author of many valuable historical and critical works, had them printed, carefully preserving their text absolutely intact, and adding to them all the references which made them complete.

A.—*Les Vies de sainte Colette Boylet de Corbie, réformatrice des Frères Mineurs et des Clarisses*, par le P. PIERRE DE REIMS dit DE VAUX et sœur PERRINE DE LA ROCHE et DE BAUME. Paris, Picard, 1911.

*Vie de sainte Colette*, par l'abbé LARCENEUX (manuscrit), Monastère des Clarisses de Poligny (Jura).

*Lettres inédites de Guillaume de Casal*, à la Bibliothèque de Besançon, publiées par le P. UBALD D'ALENÇON. Paris, Picard, 1908.

*Vie de sainte Colette*, en 110 cahiers (manuscrit), par l'abbé LARCENEUX. Monastère de Poligny. *Témoignage manuscrit de quatre bourgeois de Corbie*, 1471, acte notarié reproduit par les Boilandistes, mars, t. I, p 534-535. *Manuscrit de l'abbé de saint Laurent*, début de dix-huitième siècle. Monastère de Besançon.

*Lettres manuscrites de Catherine Rufiné*, au sujet de la réformation du couvent des franciscains de Dôle, monastère de Poligny.

Bulletin de canonisation de sainte Colette, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, cote 1827-1866.

B. The biographies, ancient and modern, of St. Colette which seemed the most useful for reference are the following :

*Histoire chronologique de la bienheureuse Colette de Corbie*, par un capucin (SYLVÈRE BOUTARD D'ABBEVILLE), à Paris, chez la veuve Nicolas Buon, rue Saint-Jacques, à l'enseigne " Saint-Claude et de l'Homme Sauvage," 1619.

P. SELIER (S.-J.), *Vie de sainte Colette*. Paris, 1861.

A. BIZOUARD. *Histoire de sainte Colette et des Clarisses en Franche-Comté et en Bourgogne*.

A. DOUILLET, *Vie de sainte Colette de Corbie*.

A. GERMAIN, *Sainte Colette de Corbie*.

A. PIDOUX, *Sainte Colette* (collection des Saints, Lecoffre).

UBALD D'ALENÇON, *Documents sur la Réforme de sainte Colette en France*. Paris, Picard, 1908.

P. GOHIET, *Esquisse historique sur la venue de sainte Colette à Nice*.

DE VRÉVILLE, *Esquisse de la vie de sainte Colette*. Besançon.

Abbé JUMEL, *Vie de sainte Colette*. Tournai, 1868.

C. Among books relating to the period in which St. Colette lived, the places she lived in, and the notable persons with whom she was concerned, we made considerable use of the following :

CORBLET, *Hagiographie du Diocèse d'Amiens*, t. I et IV.

Abbé JUMEL, *Monographie de la ville de Corbie*, publiée à Amiens.

Abbé HYVER, *l'Église des Clarisses de Pont-à-Mousson*.

Arthur HUART, *Jacques de Bourbon*.

Olivier DE LA MARCHE, *Chronique de Bourgogne*, et ses *Mémoires*.

E. DE MONSTRELET, *Chronique*.

P. FODÉRÉ, *Narration historique et topographique des couvents de l'ordre de Saint-François*. Lyon, 1619.

Le Religieux de Saint-Denis, *Chronique du règne de Charles VII*.

DE BARANTE, *Histoire de Bourgogne*.

Dom PLANCHER, *Histoire de Bourgogne*.

G. KLEINCLAUZE, *Histoire de Bourgogne*.

C. DE LABORDE, *les Ducs de Bourgogne*.

PARADIN, *Histoire de Bourgogne*.

Philippe POT, *les Grands jours de Bourgogne*.

PETIT, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne*.

B. DE MANDROT, "Jean de Bourgogne, duc de Brabant, comte de Nevers, et le procès de la succession," *Revue historique*, t. XCIII.

HENRI PIRENNE, *Histoire de Belgique*.

GODEFROY, *Histoire de Charles VI*.

- A. DE TORAS, *Armorial de Savoie*.  
CHAPPERON, *Chambéry au quatorzième siècle*.  
*Mémoires de la Société Savoisienne d'Histoire et d'Archéologie*, t. III.  
SAINT-GENIS, *Histoire de Savoie*.  
GUICHENON, *Histoire générale de la Maison de Savoie*.  
Abbé DUCIS, *Étude sur le Genevois*.  
Christian PFISTER, *Histoire de Nancy*.  
Dom CALMET, *Histoire des Ducs de Lorraine*.  
Siméon LUCE, *la France pendant la guerre de Cent Ans ; Jeanne d' Arc à Domrémy*.  
G. DU FRESNE DE BEAUCOURT, *Histoire de Charles VII*.  
C. BENOIST, *la Politique de Charles V*.  
AYROLES (S.J.), *Jeanne d' Arc*.  
A. CLEMENT, *la Chevauchée de Jeanne d' Arc en Bourbonnais*. Moulins, 1910.  
P.-P. DENIFLE, *les Malheurs de l' Église de France*.  
BAZILLE, *la Lutte entre les Universités et les ordres religieux au treizième siècle*. Montauban, 1851.  
N. VALOIS, *la France et le grand schisme d'Occident*.  
Abbé MOURRET, *Histoire de l' Église*.  
RASTOUL, *l' Unité de l' Église pendant le grand schisme*.  
L. DE KERVAIL, *Vie de saint Jean de Capistran*.  
P. THUREAU-DANGIN, *Saint Bernardine de Sienne*.  
O. FAGES (O.P.), *Saint Vincent Ferrer*.  
Abbé BOULANGER, *la Renaissance historique au quinzième siècle ; la Légende dorée de Nicolas Viguier (dominicains et franciscains)*.  
P. GRISAR (S.J.), *Histoire de Rome et des Papes au moyen âge*.  
P. BERCHMANS, *Mélanges iconographiques (étude historique sur le ms. de Marguerite d'York)*. Gand, 1912.

D. The following are the books from which our information concerning the Franciscan Order has been derived.

WADDING, *Annales Minorum*.

SBARALEA, *Bullarium franciscanum*.

T. XVIII. des *Analecta Juris Pontificii*.

*Histoire abrégée de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire d'Assise*.

Lyon-Tournai, 1901.

P. PALOMÈS, *Des Frères Mineurs et de leurs dénominations historiques*, Palerme, 1901.

GEBHART, "l'Apostolat de saint François d'Assise" (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1er septembre 1886).

F. MORIN, *Saint François d'Assise et les Franciscains*.

P. UBALD D'ALENÇON, *les Idées de saint François d'Assise sur la pauvreté*. Paris, 1909.

P. HILAIRE DE BARANTON, *Sept siècles de travaux ; les Franciscains ; l'action sociale de saint François d'Assise ; les Franciscains en France ; les Personnages illustres des trois ordres franciscains*.

A. SABATIER, *Vie de saint François d'Assise*.

J. JØRGENSEN, *Vie de saint François d'Assise*.

Those who visit the town of Ghent should make a point of seeing the magnificent manuscript, ornamented with miniatures, illuminated letters, and vignettes, which is in the library of the town. The text is a reproduction of the *Vie de Sainte Colette*, by Pierre de Vaux. This manuscript, a work of the fifteenth century, was done by order of Margaret of York, the third wife of Charles the Bold, and given by her to the convent at Ghent about 1475.

## II.

### DOCUMENTS.

These documents have been left as they appear in the original work of Mme. Ste. Marie Perrin.

#### LETTRE DE SAINTE COLETTE.

(Copiée sur la reproduction du texte autographe de Gand.  
L'original est en écriture gothique.)

Jésus ! Très chères et bien amées mères et filles et sœurs, en Dieu le plus très humblement que je puis et sçais, ma pauvre âme devant notre Seigneur en vos bonnes prières et dévotes oraisons je recommande très cordialement ; désirant votre parfaite sante spirituelle et corporelle ; en vous priant très chièrement que vous mettiez paine et diligence d'estre braves et parfaittes religieuses, fondant toutes vos œuvres en la racine de profonde humilité et embrasant vos cœurs en la très parfaite amour de Dieu, en le servant soigneusement, humblement et dévottement, en gardant entièrement la sainte riègle, et ly rendant loyaument tout ce que volontairement ly avez voué et promis ; en résistant victorieusement aux exhortations et temptacions dyaboliques. Nonobstant que vous soyez febles et débiles, si n'est-il pas à la puissance de l'ennemy d'enfer de vous vaincre si vous ne voulez être vaincues. Et ayez bonne patience en toutes contrariétés et adversités ; profitons et fructifions toujours plus en tribulacions



et afflictions que nous ne faisons en prospérité et consolations ; si la droite voye et sente qui mayne au Royaume perdurable, infailliblement et sans nullement desvoyer, c'est tribulacion et persécution pacetement reçues. Quant est de ces filles dont vous m'avez escrit, j'ai escrit à la mère abbesse mon intencion. Je recommande aux Flamangues le langage. Mon pauvre Frère P . . . je recommande humblement à vous. Je prie le Saint Esprit que vous veuil toujours assurer en sa sainte grâce. *Amen.*

S. COLETTE.

*Suscription.* “ A mes très chères et très amées mères et sœurs en Dieu an couvent de Sainte-Claire au Gand.”



EXHORTATION FAITE PAR NOTRE Bse MERE Ste. COLETTE  
AVANT SA MORT A TOUTES SES RELIGIEUSES PRÉSENTES ET  
A VENIR.

Mes très aimées Sœurs et Filles, en la charité de notre pieux at amoureux Rédempteur Jésus-Christ, tant humblement de cœur et pieusement que je puis, je me recommande à vous, en la vie, et après ma mort ; mon intention et tout le faix que j'ay a porter devant Notre-Seigneur, afin que bon compte je luy en puisse rendre en son jugement, priés-le que par mon petit labeur j'acquiers honneur, repos, gloire, et salut, sans fin, sans nombre, et sans mesure : donc, mes très aimées Filles, connaissés vôtre sainte vocation, vôtre grande dignité, et juste perfection l'ignorance étant très-pernicieuse, et la connaissance très-fructueuse : connaissés donc votre vraie entrée par la porte de divine inspiration, et amoureuse vocation.

Notre doux Sauveur dit que nul ne peut venir à moy, si mon Père ne l'attire par inspiration : cette entrée bien-heureuse au champ fertile de perfection Evangélique s'appelle abrénonciation du monde, de la chair, et de la propre volonté ; ainsi le dit le béni Jésus né de la Vierge Marie, qui veut venir après moy, renonce du tout à soi-même, et porte sa Croix en continuelle pénitence pour les péchés commis, et pour être préservée de cheoir en offense, et pour mieux garder la grâce divine.

Nottés donc, mes très aimées Filles, que vous êtes appellées par grâce à parfaite obéissance, et à toutes choses obéissés universellement ou il n'y a offense, Jésus s'est fait obéissant jusqu'à la mort : car il ne suffit pas d'obéir pour un certain tems, et en certaine chose limitée : mais ce doit être en toutes choses, qui ne sont contre Dieu, l'âme et la sainte Règle : ne préférons pas nos sens aux sens de nos Supérieures ; car la vraie sapience se soumet à Jésus et à sa douce Mère Vierge : le vrai obéissant fait purement pour Dieu ce qu'il fait, et n'a égard sinon au fait de vraie obéissance autant révéremment comme s'il l'avait reçu de la bouche de Jésus : de tant plus que le commandement est plus simple selon l'humaine apparence, devant Dieu est plus précieuse icelle révérende obéissance ; car mal vient par inobédience ; dont vaut mieux l'oraison d'un obédient que cent mille d'un méprisant ; si nous obéissons à Dieu, il obeira à vous : ôtés donc de vous, propre volonté, car c'est la seule matière du feu d'enfer : sur toutes vertus je vous recom-mande sainte obéissance, et avec cette vertu puissions-nous mourir pour avoir vie perdurable.

Après la renonciation de soy Notre-Seigneur veut que nous portions nôtre Croix : c'est notre vœu de sainte

pauvreté : Croix pesante de vouloir avoir quelque chose sinon celui qui porta sa croix sur ses épaules, et en icelle daigna mourir : ô sainte pauvreté ! parement de nôtre rédemption, précieux joyau, certain signe qui donne le Royaume du Ciel : Et vous Filles d'Adam et d'Eve, pourquoy n'aimerez-vous pas cette pierre précieuse. cette noble marguerite qui vaut en valeur et en dignité le Royaume du Ciel ?

Or mes très-aimées Sœurs, aimés, aimés cette noble vertu à l'exemple de Jésus-Christ, de nôtre glorieux Père Saint François, et de notre Mère Madame Sainte Claire : soyés grandement contentes de la forme de vôtre pauvre habit concédé par nôtre sainte Règle. Tout le reste vous soit suspect, comme livres, filet, éguilles, épingles, ou quelque autre joyau ; couvrechef, voile et autres choses à nous singulièrement appliquées par propre affection : soyés contentes dans vos nécessités pour plus légèrement parvenir au Royaume auquel vous êtes appelées par le moyen de ladite pauvreté volontairement promise et voüée.

Donc à ce Royaume faillir d'aller nous ne pouvons, si faute nous ne faisons à Madame sainte pauvreté ; et cette Croix de sainte pauvreté, j'entens être continuelle de jeûner tous les jours, la nudité et froidure des pieds, la dureté du coucher, la pauvreté du vêtir, être contente de peu et rude viande, et labeur manüel et spiritüel : quiconque sera trouvé à la mort propriétaire, ou de fait, ou de volonté délibérée, expulsé il sera du royaume des Cieux.

Vivés et mourés vrayes pauvres, mes très-aimées Filles, comme fit notre doux Sauveur en Croix pour nous : d'autant moins de gens l'aiment, plus grande occasion

avons-nous de l'aimer après Madame sainte obéissance que je vous recommande sur toutes choses.

J'entens que vous devés ensuivre Jésus-Christ, Agneau sans tache, Vierge et Fils de Vierge, par vraye pureté de cœur et de corps jusqu'à la mort, par ce vray vœu de chasteté Angélique, par lequel on est loyale Epouse de Jésus-Christ, des Anges honorées comme Epouses de leur Seigneur et Roy des Saints hautement loüé : noble couronne on portera aux nôces de notre Epoux Jésus, au Royaume des Cieux.

O comme bonne est la forte clôture ! heureuses sont celles qui la gardent, et qui ne souffrent entrer sinon les vrays messagers du vray Roy : ô digne et excellente vertu ! on ne te peut priser par lettre écrite ; Dieu seul est ton plein loyer : je la vous recommande ; et qui cette foy promise devant Dieu fausseront sans condigne reparation, tourmens horribles souffriront en éternelle damnation.

Benoite soit sainte pénitence, devant la fin de la vie présente ; car elle seule peut procurer la pleine réconciliation. Mes très aimées filles pour qui nôtre Souverain Rédempteur fut et daigna être au sépulchre de pierre, enclos pour quarante heures : en ce, mes chères Sœurs, vous l'ensuives en voüant sainte clôture, à laquelle vous vivrés quarante ans plus ou moins. Donc vous êtes déjà en votre sépulchre de pierre ; c'est votre voüée clôture. O bienheureuse clôture qui vous éloigne du vice et des occasions mauvaises ! ô noble Château fort du Roy céleste, qui ne redoute pas les assauts du monde, de la chair, ny du diable, tu as en toi générale obéissance, Fille de sainte humilité, laquelle condamne toute propre volonté, cause et racine de tous maux. Tu es provision de Madame sainte pauvreté, qui n'a cure des choses mondaines : tu enclos sainte

Chasteté, oraison, nudité, saint silence, correction, méditations, larmes, soupirs, disciplines, régulier Office, lecture de sainte Ecriture, mémoire de la Mort, Croix et Passion : va donc arrière, folle et rebelle chair, pleine de mauvaises inclinations, qui quiert partout imperfections : mais nous devons garder loyaument ce que promis nous avons ; et si aucunes fautes par humaine fragilité nous commettons, toujours sans délai par sainte pénitence nous nous devons relever, penser de bien vivre, et de saintement mourir : la fin approche ; plusieurs sont appelés, mais peu sont élus : maintes en Religion les vœux promettent solennellement ; mais très-peu sont aujourd'hui fidèles. Hélas et plus de cent mille fois ! hélas qui loyaument s'en acquitte devant Dieu qui tout sçait : mieux vaudrait sans faillir non promettre, que promettre et ne rien tenir : car de plus grande promesse est plus grande offense, et plus griève damnation : le Père de toutes miséricordes, le Fils par sa sainte Passion, le benoît Saint-Esprit fontaine de paix, de douceur, et d'amour, nous donne à toutes consolations.

*Amen.*



#### DES BULLES PONTIFICALES RELATIVES A SAINTE COLETTE

*Bullarium franciscanum, t. VII.* (Bibliothèque Nationale, cote F à H 5.)

Bulle (No. 1004) " Devotionis tuæ... "

*Benoît XIII accorde à la femme cloîtrée, Colette Boilette à Corbie, le pouvoir de fonder un monastère de moniales cloîtrées de l'ordre de Saint-Claire...*

La sincérité de votre dévotion envers Nous et l'Eglies

Romaine mérite que Nous accueillions favorablement vos demandes, autant que Nous le pouvons avec le secours de Dieu, surtout les demandes qui concernent l'accroissement du culte divin et de la religion, afin qu'elles puissent contribuer au salut des âmes. Puisque donc, comme Nous l'avons compris d'après la teneur de la pétition qui nous fut dernièrement présentée de votre part, enflammée du zèle de la religion et d'une ferveur de dévotion, pensant à votre propre salut, vous proposez, avec les aumônes et les pieuses largesses des fidèles du Christ à vous apportées ou devant vous être apportées par la suite, de fonder et d'édifier dans un lieu des diocèses d'Amiens, de Paris ou de Noyon, un monastère de moniales cloîtrées de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire approuvé par notre bienheureux prédécesseur Pape Innocent IV. pour Vous et certaines Vierges désirant servir le Seigneur dans ce monastère sous le vœu de la plus haute des vertus, de la pauvreté, il Nous a été fait de votre part humble supplique demandant qu'il Nous soit agréable de vous accorder, au nom de Notre bienveillance apostolique, licence de fonder et d'édifier ledit monastère avec église, campanile, cloche, cloître, cimetière, et autres officines accessoires, et de permettre que ledit monastère, après qu'il aura été fondé et construit, et les personnes de ce même monastère puissent user et jouir à perpétuité de tous privilèges généraux et particuliers, de toutes indulgences et grâces accordées au dit ordre par le Siège Apostolique, Nous donc, réfléchissant et recommandant à Notre Seigneur Votre dévote et louable proposition, penché favorablement vers vos supplications, Vous permettons, au nom de Notre pouvoir apostolique, de fonder et édifier un monastère de cette sorte dans un lieu honnête et convenable (malgré toutes



autres constitutions apostoliques de notre bienheureux prédécesseur Pape Boniface VIII contraires et s'y opposant, sous réserve cependant que soit toujours sauf, en toutes choses, le droit de l'église paroissiale, ou de n'importe quelle autre église). Et en outre, en vertu de Notre autorité apostolique, par la teneur des présentes, Nous permettons que ce même monastère, après qu'il aura été fondé et construit, et les personnes y vivant usent et jouissent à perpétuité, comme il est dit plus haut, de tous privilèges généraux et particuliers, de toutes indulgences et grâces concédées par l'autorité susdite.

1406, 29 avril.

(Datum Saonæ III. Kal. maii anno duo decimo).

Bulles (Nos. 1004, 1013 à 1016, 1024, 1038, 1105.)



Après une lecture attentive de ces bulles, et ces bulles ayant été comparées entre elles et avec les bulles traduites il a semblé utile de traduire entièrement la bulle "Devotionis tuæ . . ." (No. 1004) pour les raisons suivantes :

1. Les autres bulles ne font guère que de répéter ce qui est dit dans les bulles dont la traduction entière suit (No. 1015 et No. 1038) et dans la bulle "Devotionis tuæ" (No. 1004) ;

2. La bulle "Devotionis tuæ . . .", bien que assez courte est remarquable :

(a) Par l'exposition nette du but que doit viser surtout une fondatrice de couvent : l'accroissement du culte divin et de la religion.

La fondation :

(b) Par l'indication des raisons d'approuver le zèle pour

la religion, le salut particulier de la fondatrice, la sincérité de sa dévotion, la récompense des dons et anmônes ;

(c) Par l'énumération détaillée des diverses parties constituant le couvent ;

(d) Par la prudence du Siègè apostolique s'appliquant à équilibrer les diverses fondations chrétiennes et veillant à ce que les unes n'empiètent pas sur les droits acquis des autres, à ce que le clergé séculier n'ait pas à souffrir de la création d'un couvent.

Particularités contenues dans les autres bulles :

Bulle (No. 1013) " Ad futuram rei memoriam . . . " par laquelle il est permis à Colette de transférer des religieux d'autres couvents dans celui fondé par elle.

Par cette bulle, puissance est donnée à l'abbesse de faire consacrer l'église, les autels, etc., par n'importe quel évêque. Avertissement est donné qu'aucune femme ne soit admise moniale ou sœur si elle n'est pas vierge.\*

A remarquer la beauté du commencement de cette bulle :

" Il est d'un si grand prix que les personnes ecclésiastiques, surtout celles qui appartenant au sexe fragile renoncent aux séductions du monde, dédaignent la couche d'un homme mortel et se vouent à Celui qui est beau au-dessus des enfants des hommes . . . autant il Nous convient de consentir à vos vœux. . . . "

Bulle (No. 1014) " Devotionis tuæ sinceritas. . . . " Détails de la fondation, répétés ailleurs, répétés souvent. Permission de fonder un monastère à Hesdin. Rien de particulier.

\* Cette restriction, demandée par Colette, fut plus tard annulée, à sa demande.

Bulle (No. 1015) " Sincere devotionis. . . ."

" . . . Que tu puisses avoir et conserver près de toi deux frères de l'Ordre des Mineurs, personnes honnêtes et instruites que tu auras jugé bon de choisir au sein de l'Ordre lui-même, et que ces frères, ainsi élus par toi (même dans le cas où ils auraient demandé licence à leur supérieur et ne l'auraient point obtenue) puissent séjourner et demeurer avec toi ; travailler à la fondation et à la construction dudit monastère (Hesdin) et à toutes les autres tâches dont tu jugeras bon de les charger ; poursuivre ces tâches ; vaquer, selon les instructions données à tout ce dont besoin sera ; se rendre à la Curie Romaine et en revenir ; exposer, traiter toutes et chacune affaire dans les limites judicieusement tracées ; que ces mêmes frères, tu puisses les renvoyer à leur monastère et à leurs Supérieurs et les remplacer par d'autres qui auront les mêmes fonctions que leurs prédécesseurs ; Nous l'autorisons de par notre Autorité Apostolique, pour les frères dont il s'agit et pour toi même, par la teneur des Présentes, mandant, en même temps, aux Supérieurs de ces mêmes frères, d'accueillir avec bienveillance et de traiter bien les frères que tu leur auras renvoyés. . . . "

24 octobre 1406.

Bulle (No. 1016). " Ad illa libenter. . . ." Ordonne à des gardiens et des lecteurs des maisons des frères mineurs de Péronne de veiller à la correction des frères mineurs de Hesdin. " Ils doivent veiller à ce que les frères de Hesdin mènent une vie régulière stricte selon les statuts du bienheureux François et selon les ordonnances

et déclarations sans aucun changement, et chasser ceux qui ne s'y conformeraient pas, et faire tout ce qu'il leur paraîtra convenir à la prospérité et tranquillité de ladite maison."

Bulle (No. 1024) "Inter cæter. . . ." Accorde à Colette, à qui Blanche, châtelaine du diocèse de Romilly, offre un lieu pour fonder un couvent de Sainte-Claire, de recevoir ce lieu.

Bulle (No. 1105). "Devotionis tuæ. . . ." Donne à Colette, abbesse du monastère de Clarisses de Besançon, faculté de fonder un autre ou d'autres couvents de cloitrées de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire, année 1412.

Cette bulle est intéressante par ce qu'elle manifeste de l'étendue des pouvoirs accordés à Colette.

"(Nous te donnons licence) d'envoyer des frères de l'ordre des frères mineurs, honnêtes et propres à cet office, comme confesseurs des abbesses et des moniales des monastères fondés, et de les décharger de cette fonction et de les renvoyer à leurs monastères ou à leurs supérieurs, *aussi souvent qu'il te semblera bon* ; en outre, de fonder dans l'église du monastère de Besançon deux capellanies perpétuelles . . . et seront assignés à ces deux capellanies par toi . . . deux prêtres capables qui soient tenus de célébrer dans l'église même certaines messes et d'autres offices divins *selon ton ordonnance*, lesquels prêtres jouiront de cette faveur temporairement et non à titre de bénéfice perpétuel, lesquels mêmes prêtres pourront être déchargés de cet office par toi ou l'abbesse te remplaçant, *aussi souvent qu'il semblera bon* à toi et à l'abbesse et remplacés par d'autres. Et Nous statuons et même ordonnons que votre confesseur, que vous aurez choisi, ait et puisse

exercer tout le pouvoir qu'a d'ordinaire le protecteur, élu temporairement, des ordres susdits dans la dite curie, à l'égard des personnes appartenant à ces ordres, tant dans la réception des moniales l'investiture ou les mutations des abbesses, que dans les dispensations de toutes sortes. . . .”

Après la mort de sainte Colette, le 23 octobre 1448, le pape Nicolas V. accorde à Pierre de Vaux, qui représente la réforme colettine, le pouvoir de dispenser et relever du défaut de légitime naissance dix religieux et religieuses afin de les rendre aptes à entrer dans l'ordre franciscain. Cette demande avait sans doute été faite par sainte Colette, c'est pourquoi nous joignons ici l'indication de cette bulle.

Bulle (No. 1038) “ Dum attenta . . . ” par laquelle Benoît XIII. concède à Colette, reçue par lui religieuse de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire et qui lui en a fait dans ses mains profession expresse, et aux autres moniales vivant dans la plus stricte pauvreté, le monastère de Besançon en lieu et place de celui qui devait être fondé dans le domaine de Romilly,

A sa chère fille en Jésus-Christ Colette Boillete moniale de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire.

Nous vous avons donc, il est vrai, accordé récemment, lorsque vous proposiez, avec les aumônes et les pieuses largesses des fidèles du Christ à vous apportées et devant vous être apportées par la suite, de fonder et édifier dans quelque lieu des diocèses d'Amiens, de Paris ou de Noyon, un monastère de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire pour vous et certaines moniales désirant y servir Notre Seigneur sous le vœu de la plus stricte pauvreté.—Nous vous avons

accordé de fonder et édifier ledit monastère dans un lieu honnête et convenable des dits diocèses avec église, campanille, cloche, cloître, cimetière et autres officines nécessaires, à telle fin que ce même monastère, après qu'il aurait été fondé, et les personnes y vivant puissent user et jouir de tous les privilèges concédés au dit ordre par le Siège apostolique et ensuite, après vous avoir reçue moniale de cet ordre selon la profession expresse que vous avez remise en Nos mains—Nous avons accordé, écoutant vos supplications, à toutes les moniales des monastères du dit ordre et aux sœurs de tous autres couvents et lieux consacrés quels qu'ils fussent, voulant passer dans ce même monastère, de s'y transporter de ces couvents, cloîtres et autres lieux—et Nous avons fait et édicter quelques statuts pour la construction dudit monastère et de quelques statuts et ordonnances visant les fonctions et l'utilité du dit monastère ;—et ensuite, selon ce qui Nous a été exposé de votre part, comme vous n'aviez pas trouvé un lieu apte à la construction dans un des diocèses susdits, mais que Notre chère fille en Jésus-Christ, noble femme Blanche de Genève, souveraine de Romilly dans le diocèse de G . . . , voulait vous donner pour y fonder et édifier un monastère semblable un lieu apte dans son domaine de Romilly ou ailleurs dans le diocèse de G . . . —Nous avons jugé bon, ainsi qu'il est pleinement expliqué dans nos diverses lettres lâ-dessus, de vous accorder licence de construire un autre monastère de l'ordre susdit dans ce même lieu devant vous être donné par Blanche et de faire tout le nécessaire pour une construction de cette sorte.

Or, ainsi que le contenait votre demande présentée à Nous de votre part, comme, d'un autre côté, vous et les moniales voulant vivre avec vous dans la dite pauvreté en ce



couvent de Besançon du dit ordre de la dite Sainte, qui, ainsi que nous l'avons appris, est dans une telle désolation, puisque dans ce couvent, qui jusqu'ici contenait ordinairement un grand nombre de moniales, il n'y a plus présentement que deux moniales, vous avez offert à Notre-Seigneur le dessein de le servir en cet endroit où vous mèneriez une vie plus dévote et plus paisible que dans le monastère que vous aviez eu d'abord le projet de fonder dans le dit lieu de Romilly,—il nous a été fait de votre part humble supplique qu'il Nous soit agréable, dans notre bienveillance apostolique, de vous assigner et attribuer à perpétuité, à vous et à ces moniales pour votre usage et pour l'usage des autres moniales, ce même couvent de Besançon, avec son église, ses habitations et autres officines, pour y vivre dans la plus stricte pauvreté.

Nous donc, écoutant favorablement ces supplications, Nous vous assignons, à vous et aux moniales susdites ce même monastère avec son église et ses officines . . . , à telle fin qu'il soit permis à vous et à ces vierges de recevoir sous votre propre autorité, et de garder pour votre usage et l'usage des moniales qui auront voulu y vivre dans la dite pauvreté, la possession corporelle du dit monastère, et de ses officines sans que licence en soit demandée au dit monastère, sans que puissent y faire obstacle aucunes constitutions apostoliques, ni aucuns statuts ni aucunes coutumes de ce monastère de Besançon, sous la réserve que les deux moniales résidant présentement dans le dit monastère n'aient à en souffrir aucun préjudice, mais que sur les biens du dit couvent, il leur soit fourni convenablement les choses nécessaires aussi longtemps qu'elles voudront y résider. En outre Nous voulons que vous et les moniales vivant en la dite pauvreté dans ce

couvent, vous puissiez user et jouir également de tous les privilèges—concedés par le Siège Apostolique aux autres couvents du même ordre.—Nulli ergo. . .

Datum apud Postum Veneris Januar dicet., VI. cal. februarii  
anno quarto decimo.



SUPPLIQUE ADRESSÉE PAR COLETTE AU PAPE MARTIN V. EN  
1418.

Votre dévouée Sœur Colette, Religieuse de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire du couvent de Poligny, du diocèse de Besançon, supplie Votre Sainteté qu'Elle daigne dans sa miséricorde lui accorder cette faveur spéciale : qu'il lui soit permis à elle-même ou à son visiteur de visiter en personne autant de fois qu'il lui semblera utile, et en honnête et décente compagnie, les résidences de ses sœurs, c'est-à-dire Besançon, Auxonne et Poligny.

Qu'Elle daigne accorder au visiteur des dits couvents, à l'Abbesse et à la majorité des sœurs élues au secret en même temps qu'à quatre frères mineurs tant prêtres que laïques, le pouvoir de librement décider en toutes matières concernant l'administration des sacrements et des aumônes conformément à la loi et à la forme de la Règle des sœurs, et, quand il semblera utile, de déposer l'un ou l'autre, de mettre en leur place l'un ou l'autre parmi les anciens élus.

Qu'aucune sœur des couvents susnommés ne puisse être reçue ou transférée dans d'autres résidences, sinon au su et selon le bon plaisir et la volonté du visiteur d'accord avec l'abbesse et la majorité des sœurs du couvent où elles auront été reçues ou admises comme professes, et avec

mention expresse et littérale de l'indult dans les lettres apostoliques traitant de cette matière : nous confions au général qui témoignera, conformément aux convenances et à la règle de l'ordre.

“ Accordé par O.” (lettre initiale d’Otto Colonna, Martin V.) 4 août 1918.



LETTRE DE GUILLAUME DE CASAL A MAHAUT DE SAVOIE,  
EPOUSE DE LOUIS DE BAVIERE.

Très illustre Dame et très dévote fille du Bienheureux François, bien qu'en mon absence j'aie déjà accordé l'autorisation de fonder un monastère de l'ordre de Sainte-Claire sous la direction de notre très pieuse et très dévote fille sœur Collette, j'envoie cependant ci-jointes, selon qu'il est en mon pouvoir d'accorder cette faveur, les confiant à nos pieux frères, les lettres demandées auprès de notre Très Saint Seigneur, voulant toujours faire ce que j'aurai pensé devoir être agréable à votre fervente dévotion. Parce que, Très Illustre Dame, quand vous avez voulu consacrer votre propre fille au très bienheureux père François et à la glorieuse vierge Claire, vous m'avez pour toujours obligé moi-même et l'ordre tout entier à donner satisfaction à vos désirs. L'illustre dame Marguerite votre sœur, dans son veuvage, sert Dieu sous le tiers ordre de Saint-Dominique, auprès de l'illustre seigneur Marcion de Montferrat, à qui, Très Illustre Dame, après avoir reçu votre lettre, j'ai écrit de votre part, la réconfortant et l'exhortant et m'offrant moi aussi à son entière disposition de même que je me suis déjà offert à vous tout entièrement, Très Illustre Dame.

LETTRE DE GUILLAUME DE CASAL, GENRALE DE L'ORDRE,  
A HENRI DE BAUME (TRADUCTION).

En Jésus-Christ, à ses très chers frères, Pierre Albus de Romanis et Henri de Balme de la province de Bourgogne. Frère Guillaume de Casal, ministre et serviteur général de l'ordre des frères mineurs et maître en Théologie sacrée, salut et paix éternelle dans le Seigneur. Le souci de ma sollicitude dans le gouvernement des âmes, que je considère imposé à mes épaules par les fonctions du ministère général de notre ordre, m'engage et m'incite sans cesse, les vieilles corruptions ayant été extirpées, à planter les nouveaux germes d'une observance régulière et d'une vie amendée dans ces lieux surtout où il semble que notre religion, avec les ressources divines et aussi les ressources humaines, doive produire des fruits plus abondants. Et comme je ne doute pas que dans le couvent de Chambéry cette réforme ne donne de grands fruits à cause des frères que j'y ai préposés, remarquables par leur zèle à observer la règle, par leurs mérites, leurs vertus, et leur fréquentation assidue dans la direction du gouvernement spirituel, et comme je connais ces mêmes qualités en vous-mêmes et dans vos personnes souvent louées, et le bien beaucoup plus grand que vous faites par vos prédications, et que je sais votre expérience, encouragé par les conseils, les recommandations et l'heureuse persuasion de plusieurs docteurs en théologie sacrée et d'autres excellents pères, je vous constitue et vous déclare constitués par les présentes mes commissaires dans ce même couvent. Vous donnant pleine autorité à vous ensemble et séparément et à chacun de vous, de régir, gouverner et réformer ce même couvent et tous les frères quels qu'ils soient, y demeurant ou devant y demeurer, quels que

soient leurs noms et leurs titres, d'instituer et de destituer, de chasser ceux qui auront manqué gravement, de condamner et punir irrévocablement, de libérer quand en raison de votre discernement et de la gravité de votre charge vous l'aurez jugé utile, et enfin dans toute autre chose concernant la direction, le gouvernement et la correction du dit couvent et des dits frères, je vous confère mes pleins pouvoirs, toute l'autorité de ma charge et aussi les moyens par lesquels vous pouvez introduire et maintenir avec le plus de facilité la vraie observance de notre profession et des statuts de notre règle pour la gloire du Dieu tout-puissant et pour l'exaltation de notre ordre séraphique et afin que de ces œuvres réformées de notre religion soit heureuse la fervente dévotion de notre Très Illustre Seigneur le Duc de Savoie qui les requiert d'un très grand désir et afin que l'exemple d'une vie plus sainte entraîne les peuples qui attendent de nous l'aliment du salut. Et ce pouvoir, afin que vous puissiez le remplir et l'accomplir avec un plus grand mérite, je vous commande et vous enjoins de le recevoir avec humilité et respect par sainte obéissance et par la vertu de l'esprit saint, comme un pouvoir à vous délégué de ma mission et de mon autorité, et l'ayant reçu, de l'exercer avec grande sollicitude et grand soin selon la multiple grâce à vous donnée par le Seigneur. Et de même les frères présents et à venir doivent vous obéir fermement en toutes choses comme à moi au nom de cette même obéissance et sous peine de prison infligée par rigoureuse sentence et de honteuse expulsion du dit couvent sans que quelqu'un puisse y contredire, et que soient maintenus sévèrement ceux que je recommande dans le Seigneur à vous-mêmes

et à vos charités ainsi que je vous recommande à eux-mêmes. Et puisque j'ai décidé d'agir avec le même désir et la même application pour la réforme des minoresses de ce même monastère de Chambéry et d'y veiller avec sollicitude, je veux par les présentes que vous usiez et puissiez user de la même autorité tant à l'égard de l'abbesse qu'à l'égard des autres sœurs et des autres personnes vouées au service de ce même monastère et dans tout ce qui concerne la direction et le gouvernement de ce même monastère. Mandant à l'abbesse, aux présentes et aux futures sœurs, de vous obéir en tout fermement à vous-mêmes et à chacun de vous comme à ma personne. Que le Seigneur vous garde et priez pour moi. Donné à Chambéry le 2e jour de septembre. En l'an du Seigneur quatorze cent trente et un.



LETTRE DE GUILLAUME DE CASAL, GENERALE DE L'ORDRE  
DES MINEURS, A COLETTE, PORTANT APPROBATION DE  
SES CONSTITUTIONS.

A ma très religieuse fille en J.-C. et dévote sœur  
Colette.

Très dévote fille en Jésus-Christ, j'ai entendu le frère Pierre, votre confesseur, sur l'approbation et confirmation des Constitutions qui à première vue semblent assez difficiles et ardues en certains passages. Mais, comme j'étais sur ce point assez anxieux et soucieux, d'une part craignant de déplaire à votre dévotion que presse le zèle de Dieu et le salut des âmes, doutant d'autre part si je devais imposer à mes sœurs et filles des choses si difficiles, j'ai remis ma décision à Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ



et aux mérites de saint Antoine de Padoue, auquel je souhaite être dignement dévot. Et je me suis alors convaincu à mons sens par les mérites de ce dit saint mon patron que c'était là œuvre spéciale de Dieu. C'est pourquoi je n'ai pas seulement confirmé, mais encore j'ai établi, déclaré et autorisé vos *Constitutions*, et ainsi je vous les transmets, ainsi qu'à vos filles, de mon autorité de chef et général du chapitre aussi bien que de mon autorité apostolique, déclarées et corroborées au sceau pendant de l'ordre et avec toutes autres solennelles précautions. J'exhorte vos dévotes filles présentes et futures à le recevoir dévotement et à les observer dans l'obéissance et l'humilité. Ne doutez pas que, par les mérites de notre saint père François, auteur de notre sanctissime règle et de la très sainte vierge Claire, première plante de cette fertile terre, des fruits mûrissant pour la vie éternelle s'ensuivent. Je vous prie en premier, ayant confiance en l'efficacité de votre oraison que vous veuillez prier pour moi, qui suis dans une grande indigence.

Pour vous, ma fille bien-aimée en J.-C., je déclare que ces statuts ne vous sont nullement obligatoires, afin que vous puissiez accomplir les choses pour lesquelles Jésus-Christ vous a suscitée : car l'Apôtre a dit que celui qui est conduit par un plus haut esprit de Dieu n'est pas sous la loi.

Adieu dans le Christ, ma très dévouée fille et digne mère, priez pour moi.

De Thonon, province de Savoie,\* 28 septembre 1434.

\* Signé : *Frater Gulielmus de Casali, ordinis minorum generalis minister inutilis, propria manu.*





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